

AN
ARCHDEMON'S
DILEMMA: HOW TO
LOVE YOUR
ELF BRIDE

9

FUMINORI TESHIMA

ILL. COMTA



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The book cover features a detailed illustration of two anime-style characters. On the left, a male character with long, dark blue hair and a red eye patch is dressed in a dark red military-style uniform with gold buttons and a large blue bow at the collar. He has a serious expression. On the right, a female character with long, flowing white hair and blue eyes is shown in a white wedding dress with a red sash and a black lace collar. She has her hands clasped near her face in a shy or surprised pose. The background is dark and moody, with chains visible at the top. The title is written in a stylized, pink and white font within a yellow-outlined hexagonal shape in the upper right corner.

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*"But first...
there's this,"*

Foll said as she turned
her attention toward an
androgynous sorcerer.

*"Hehehe... You didn't
ask Zagan for help?
How brave of you..."*

Archdemon Bifrons was,
for some reason, standing
right before her.



And right in front of them... was a
king-sized bed with two pillows.
What the hell is going on...?
There were other rooms in their suite,
but this was the only one with a bed.



**"Are you
sorcerers
unable to even
understand
this much?
Giving up on a
fight, yielding
over victory...
What would
you call
this if not
humiliation?!"**

**Zagan nodded in understanding.
Even though he showed his
power, he never launched an
attack of his own.**

**"Hmm.
You certainly have a point.
Sorry about that."**

**That was why Zagan decided to
wield his full power to crush this
boy, as a form of apology.**

**"Then here I come.
At least try to keep your
eyes open until the very end."**

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Prologue

The Holy City Raziel. Located at the center of the continent, it was home to the church's headquarters and thereby the most hostile metropolis in the world for sorcerers.

Zagan and Nephy found themselves in the Jewel of Raziel, the most luxurious lodging in town, which was normally exclusive to nobles and VIPs. And right in front of them... was a king-sized bed with two pillows.

What the hell is going on...?

There were other rooms in their suite, but this was the only one with a bed. Other accommodations like sleepwear and tableware were prepared in sets of two, proving that the establishment understood there were, in fact, two customers. And that meant this wasn't a blunder on their behalf.

Zagan timidly looked to his side. Nephy's pointy ears... or, more accurately, her entire face was bright red. This was the girl who, at one point, did not understand the true meaning of a man and a woman sleeping together. But judging from her reaction just now, it was clear that she had grown past that phase. This was likely something that Manuela had taught her indirectly.

After a tense pause, Nephy looked back up at Zagan, seeking help.
“.....”

Their eyes met, and the two of them averted their gazes in a panic.

“H-Hehehe...”

“A-Ahaha...”

They both let out dry laughs then once more sank into silence.

What the hell do I do here? Foll and my other subordinates have been around lately, so I have no idea how to spend time with just Nephy!

“Th-This is the kind of room used... for a honeymoon, right?”
Nephy mumbled quietly. She was extremely nervous, but her voice showed no signs of reluctance.

What...? She's already accepted this situation?

Nephy was apparently a step above him in terms of resolve, so Zagan took a deep breath and mentally prepared himself.

“N-Nephy!”

“Y-Yes?!”

Even though he called out to her, he had no idea what to say next,

so a cold bead of sweat ran down his cheek.

The start of this tale began one morning several days ago.

Chapter I: We Miraculously Got Some Time Alone, so We Ended up Going on a Honeymoon

It was dark and cold. But despite that, the air was dry to the point where it burned one's lungs. The wind was supposed to feel gentle, but it was sharp enough to tear one's skin.

There were several stone pillars lined up in the area. They were covered in green moss, and each one was thick enough to fully contain a small house. Looking up to try and see what those pillars supported revealed nothing, as they ran so high that one could not see the ends. There was no ceiling. All that spread out above was a muddy darkness, as if stuck between twilight and the night.

Where am I? Why am I here?

As she came to, she finally realized that she was lying on the ground. The inside of her head was a complete haze, and shaking her head caused a dull pain to strike her. Also, for some reason, that pain felt nostalgic.

"Huh? I feel like... this has happened before..."

But when? She wasn't sure, but she knew she'd seen this exact scenery already?

"Back then... Yeah..."

There was someone else with her at the time. A beautiful person with luscious locks so long that they reached the ground. And yet, that person seemed sad, melancholic, and wore an expression that would pain any onlooker's heart. Their voice never really came out, and all she could do was watch them.

"And then...?"

She felt like that person was looking at something. What was it, though? Something at the very end of that muddy sky... something far beyond those pillars. It was as if they were gazing at the very ends of the world...

"No... that's not right. It was something far more terrifying..."

What was that person looking at back then? The pillars around her lined up into two rows and formed a path. But it didn't give off the solemn atmosphere of a temple. Instead, it had a cold-hearted chill to it... like a funeral. And, as she strained her eyes to try and see what was at the end of the path, a small hand covered her vision.

"You mustn't look beyond there."

And just then, Lilith woke up.

"Huh...?"

As she opened her eyes, she spotted the now familiar stone ceiling above her and a blue-haired siren peeking over her. It was her roommate, Selphy.

"You okay, Lilith? You were, like, totally moaning in your sleep."

"Selphy...?" Lilith muttered. Then she realized she was drenched in sweat upon having that pointed out to her. Her heart was beating like a hammer, and it was also difficult for her to breathe.

"A dream...?"

The cold, piercing wind that scraped her skin, the pain which jolted her head, and the dry air which burned her throat were all so vivid that they didn't seem like a dream at all. And above all else was the shame that Lilithiera, the princess of the succubi, was unable to control her own dream.

As she tried to get up, her disheveled red hair ran along her chest, and Selphy propped up her back in concern.

"Are you sure you're okay? You should, like, just take the day off if you're not feeling well."

Lilith's voice refused to leave her throat immediately, so she shook her head and paused before replying.

"More importantly... was someone else here?"

"Huh? Oh..." Selphy mumbled as she averted her gaze and continued, "Miss Alshiera was, but... she told me not to tell..."

Lilith's childhood friend covered her mouth in a panic, but it was already far too late for that. This was more Alshiera's fault for being spotted by the scatterbrained girl, anyway.

"Lady Alshiera?"

Then was it Alshiera who showed her that dreadful dream?

No... She may have been the one who saved me...

It felt like she had somehow entered Lilith's dream. Lilith still didn't know what Alshiera was thinking, but oddly enough, it was true that she had never brought harm to her. And if she'd really planned to do something, Alshiera would have surely driven Selphy out before that. Sneaking in without being noticed should have been a cinch for a vampire like her.

Meaning... she was in such a panic that she couldn't afford the time...?

The voice she'd heard at the end of the dream had sounded like Alshiera.

And, above all else, that girl from back then might just be...

The dream she'd seen when she was a child featured someone with long hair, someone who seemed to share a passing resemblance to Alshiera. Lilith tried to recall the details, but an intense sense of

fear suddenly struck her heart. In response, she grabbed her own shoulders and shuddered.

“Sorry, Selphy... I’ll be resting today...”

“Okey-dokey. But first...” Selphy replied as she plopped down on Lilith’s bed.

“Fweh?”

The very next instant, something soft wrapped around Lilith. And before she knew it, Selphy was embracing her while gently stroking her hair.

“It’s okay. There’s nothing scary here...”

“W-Wawawawa...”

And with Lilith still in a complete fluster, Selphy pressed her forehead against hers. “Hmmm, you don’t seem to have a fever or anything. Keep warm anyway, okay?”

“I-I know!”

“Also, you’re all sweaty, so tell me if you need a bath,” Selphy said with a carefree laugh as she finally let Lilith go.

“D-Don’t treat me like a child!”

“Oh, come on! I’m just worried, understand?” Selphy complained before letting out a tiny chuckle. Then she continued, “Tell me if anything’s bothering you, okay? Alshiere Imera is over, so there’s, like, no big hurry or anything in the kitchen.”

“...Thanks.”

Strangely enough, the fear that had been assaulting Lilith mere moments ago had completely vanished. It really was good fortune that her childhood friend was by her side.

After Selphy left her room, Lilith rolled out of bed and put her feet on the ground.

“I should report this to His Highness, right...?”

That action had the potential of harming Alshiera, but she felt the Archdemon was capable of settling matters in the best way possible, even taking that into account. And so, Lilith slapped both her cheeks with vigor and stood from her bed.



“Good morning, Master Zagan.”

The one greeting Zagan, who was sitting on his throne with a muddled expression on his face, was a girl with white hair that went down to her waist. She had smooth skin, like powdered snow, and her minute facial features were accented by her transparent azure eyes. She wore her blue one-piece dress and a white apron, same as always, and had a boorish yet familiar collar around her neck. She was just as beautiful and charming as always, so the sight made Zagan’s lips slacken into a smile.

“Oh, good morning, Nephy,” Zagan replied in a gentle voice, completely forgetting his prior melancholy.

How many months did it take for him to be able to reply so smoothly to a morning greeting, you ask? It had been nearly eight months since he first met Nephy, and back then he couldn’t really get the words out of his throat, let alone give her a normal greeting.

Perhaps because his expression had loosened up, Nephy smiled back at him in relief. And without the need to speak any further, a pleasant silence spread throughout the throne room. If his undesirable friend were to see them, he was sure to say something like, “Wow, you idiots sure can put on some really stupid smiles around each other, huh?”

Setting that aside, the two of them were overflowing with happiness first thing in the morning. After standing around in silence for a while, Nephy shifted her focus over to Zagan’s hand.

“Oh, Master Zagan, that’s...”

“Hm? Oh, yeah, it’s the pipe you gave me. It’s called a *kiseru*, right?”

Nephy had gifted him the pipe on the evening of the church festival known as Alshire Imera. It was normally used alongside shredded tobacco that was placed in the pipe’s bowl, but currently it was empty. Zagan twirled it around in his hand and slapped it against his palm.

“I wasn’t smoking or anything. I just so happened to pull it out without thinking.”

It does have a nice feel to it.

It didn’t simply taste and smell good, it was also nice to the touch. Though, naturally, the taste and smell from the pipe depended on the quality of the tobacco itself. He wasn’t all that familiar with it, but what he currently used was fragrant and quite bitter. The feeling of exaltation from smoking it was one thing, but the aroma and flavor were also quite satisfying.

“I’m relieved that it pleases you, Master Zagan,” Nephy said, her pointy ears shooting straight out as she smiled.

“It’s something you gave me, Nephy. Isn’t it obvious that it’s now my most precious treasure?”

Zagan replied in a dead-serious tone, leading Nephy to turn bright red right to the tips of her ears.

“Hwah?”

“Um, it’s just... the only time you smoked from it was that night on Alshire Imera, so I thought, perhaps... that it didn’t suit your tastes...”

“Huh? Aren’t things like this meant to be hidden away and protected?”

In his mind, it was similar in principle to leaving your favorite food for last. He would only use it to celebrate something... or to reward himself.

"Ah... I'm glad you're so pleased with it..." Nephy said as she covered her face with her hands and let her gaze wander about. And even as he writhed in agony over watching her unable to keep her feelings in check, Zagan cleared his throat with a cough.

"A-Anyway, I have something I want to ask..."

"Y-Yes? What is it?"

"Um, how do I put it...? Well... how do you... like the gloves I gave you?"

As a matter of fact, Zagan had only seen her wearing them the very day he handed them over. And this time, Nephy turned red once more.

"The embroidery is very pretty, and they feel nice to wear. I make sure to use them every single day."

"R-Really? In that case, it's fine for you to wear them more regularly..."

"I-I can't! If I do, they'll get dirty!" Nephy shouted as her eyes shot wide open, as if implying such a thing was completely unthinkable.

"I-Is that so?" Zagan replied, somewhat taken aback. Zagan himself was keeping his pipe aside, so he wasn't really one to talk. And now that he thought of it carefully, wearing gloves meant for winter indoors was quite weird. It was a little too late to reconsider, but if he wanted something for her to wear regularly, he should have picked silk gloves.

Manuela really is quite skilled when it comes to these things... She always picked clothes which were suitable in terms of both beauty and practical use. Though, in his defense, Zagan had only heard about Alshire Imera from Gremory on the day of. And since he was trying to pick out something special, he wanted to choose something without relying on Manuela. He wasn't all that confident about whether he was successful or not, though.

And suddenly, a certain doubt came to mind.

"Hm? Then how are you using them, exactly?"

Was she gazing at them while propping them up as a decoration? Zagan didn't prop up his pipe or anything, but he found himself gazing at it and fiddling with it all the time without even realizing it.

"Huh? Um... that's... uh..."

"Hm? You may speak of it," Zagan proclaimed. He was spotted fiddling with his pipe, so now he wanted to know how Nephy was using her gloves.

Actually, I want to see more of Nephy acting all embarrassed...

Nephy faltered nervously, but she was one to seriously respond to

his mean-spirited requests.

“Um... do you promise not to laugh?”

“I promise,” Zagan replied without hesitation. Grinning didn’t count as laughing anyway, so he was probably fine.

Nephy’s shoulders drooped down as if her retreat was cut off, and after a short pause, she began speaking timidly.

“I-I use them... before sleeping.”

“Before sleeping?”

“Y-Yes...”

“How do you use them?”

“Huh? Th-That’s...”

Zagan wanted to yell at himself for asking such an insensitive question, but Nephy seemed to have lost her mind from the shock, because she started replying in a serious tone.

“I-I put them on and rub them against my cheeks!”

Zagan was sent reeling back from the extraordinary shock to his system.

Why the hell are you so damn cute?!



Just thinking of that scene rendered him short of breath. And Nephy herself seemed to have realized exactly what she'd just said because her eyes began twirling about in a fluster.

"A-Ah... I-I mean, not that! Um... putting on those gloves reminds me of you, so it kind of feels like I'm being touched by you... No! I mean...!"

I never thought she would like them that much... Zagan was struck by a light dizziness upon learning Nephy's deepest, darkest secret. On the other hand, Nephy was now so red that it felt like she would faint at any moment. A cornered Nephy was adorable, but it was better to stop pushing her, so Zagan got his own breathing in order.

"M-Mmm... I-I'm happy that you're treasuring them."

"Ah... I will... restrain myself a little."

"Oh, no, I won't force your hand, so you don't need to worry about it..." Zagan said, panicking because he realized he'd been teasing her too much.

"That won't do. I was being careful not to dirty them, but yesterday, I ended up falling asleep while wearing them."

She slept with them on? Zagan tried imagining Nephy rubbing the gloves against her cheeks and falling asleep while doing so, which nearly brought him to an eternal slumber himself. Fortunately enough, Nephy didn't seem to realize the carelessness of her statement, so Zagan managed to regain his composure.

"Worry not," Zagan replied with a nod. Then he said, "Any wound will be healed and any dirt will be cleaned immediately all on its own. I wish for you to use them as you will."

"...Understood. Thank you... very much."

Their spirits were soaring as high as their embarrassment at that point.

Nephy's treating hers so precious, so I'm the one who's a disappointment here... Zagan mulled over his own incompetence, and it seemed to show on his face.

"Um, Master Zagan? Is something the matter?" Nephy asked, looking up at him with an anxious gaze all the while.

"Hm? Oh, no, it's not really a problem or anything... Well, it's kind of a problem, but how do I put it...?"

"Could you tell me about it?"

Zagan could only look back with a troubled expression as his beloved pleaded with him.

Well, I made Nephy all embarrassed, so I guess it's unfair if I remain silent... And so Zagan held up his pipe.

"I believe there's proper etiquette and the like when it comes to smoking and how to hold a pipe, but even when I searched through

the grimoires I had on hand, I couldn't find any information. That's why I'm unsure how to hold it properly."

"Even grimoires do not possess the knowledge?"

"It seems not."

"So it's that profound a topic... I didn't realize at all that it was such a difficult matter... What have I done?"

"No, it's not your fault, Nephy. I'm simply ashamed of my own ignorance..."

Unfortunately for these two, there was nobody around to point out the simple mistake they were making. Zagan didn't worry about it too much because smoking was just a hobby, but this was a present he'd received from Nephy. If he were to use it in an embarrassing manner, it would reflect poorly on her. Or so he thought. Half the reason he simply fiddled with the pipe was because of that fact.

"Oh! Wouldn't the store I bought this from have the information you require?!" Nephy exclaimed as she clapped her hands together.

"Hm... I see! A store should certainly have a grasp of how to use their own goods. Well done, Nephy."

"You honor me," Nephy replied as her pointy ears quivered about in joy. Then she shyly smiled at him and continued with, "If it pleases you, would you like me to go ask them?"

"What? You'd go so far for me? Aren't you busy?"

"It's something I gifted to you, so I must confirm such things myself."

Zagan's chest became hot from hearing such praiseworthy words. However, he wasn't sure whether it was right to simply accept Nephy's kindness when the issue was his own ignorance. And, as he racked his brains over the conundrum, Nephy pushed him further into the corner.

"Besides, I would like to be the one teaching you once in a—"

"Okay, I'll leave it to you."

"Hwah?" Nephy let out a small scream at his immediate reply.

Hmph! Like I could refuse Nephy wanting to focus all her attention on teaching me! She didn't say as much, but that was how Zagan interpreted it.

"I-In any case, preparations for breakfast are complete."

"O-Oh... Right."

"Should we call Miss Alshiera to join us?" Nephy asked as she peeked up at Zagan's face. That was the name of the vampire he'd met near the eastern island of Liucaon several months ago. She had been living in his castle since the incident on Alshiere Imera. However, Zagan found that vampire extremely disagreeable, and Nephy knew this full well.

I guess I'm the one who invited her to stay... It also pained him to

turn down Nephy's suggestion. And as such, Zagan rose to his feet.

"Okay. I'll go get her."

"I could call her for you... if you wish."

"No, she's making use of that room, so I'll go."

It was the one room in the castle that even Nephy was not allowed to enter.



Zagan headed towards a room directly below his throne. It was a large grotto located a couple dozen meters below ground. All sorcery made from Heaven's Phosphor was innately dangerous, so this was a space he'd prepared, modeled after Archdemon Palace, precisely for such a purpose. He both researched and made trial runs of his forbidden spell here, so the risk of it running wild or a curse breaking out was fairly high. As such, even Nephy was prohibited from entering without permission.

It's only this big to begin with because I miscalculated the amount of restraint I have to put into Heaven's Phosphor before.

It happened just around the time Gremory, Kimaris and the other sorcerers fell under his employ. Back then, the room was only the size of a slightly large laboratory, but after an accidental discharge of Heaven's Phosphor Fivefold Grand Flower, it ended up expanding to the size of a lake. He had both Kimaris and Gremory on standby just in case the worst were to occur, which is why the two of them were so frightened during his fight with Orias.

He at least installed supports and such to make sure there wouldn't be a cave in, but it was uncertain what kind of effect the accidental discharge of Heaven's Phosphor had on the stratum below or the air within the grotto itself. There were no visible signs of danger now, but he didn't know how it would be after ten, twenty, or a hundred years.

A clear ringing sound resounded throughout the dangerous grotto. It sounded like a bell, but it wasn't one. It was a glass filled with wine. Just from shaking it slightly, it let out a ring. And at the center of the ringing was a small girl.

The wine glass was being supported by a long and narrow iron construct. The rectangular lump of iron had a grip like that of a crossbow and was about the same length as an adult male's forearm. And the little girl had such a boorish construct in her hand. It was a weapon called a Seraph Hunter, built a thousand years ago.

Strangely enough, each time the ringing echoed through the grotto, the lump of iron changed from black to white, and from white to black. Zagan could tell with his eyes that she was in fact stowing and drawing two different weapons from her sheathe — though she

herself called it a holster — under her skirt.

And at a terrifying speed too...

She held the tip of the weapon up slightly and balanced the wine glass in the air. And before gravity could take its course, she put away her weapon and drew the other one, returning it right underneath the wine glass. In a manner of speaking, that's all that was happening, but with such a large mass of metal colliding with such flimsy glass, it would normally shatter.

What was truly terrifying was that the weapon came to a complete stop right before touching the wine glass, and she repeated this hundreds upon thousands of times without it being perceivable by the eye.

Zagan himself had witnessed the power of the Seraph Hunters. Would he even be able to win against her if she used those?

No, it'd be futile... at least, for now.

Zagan had already defeated three different Archdemons, but he was capable of honestly admitting his weakness. If his preparations beforehand were perfect, then it might have been possible to challenge her. But going into battle assuming one's preparations were perfect was the act of a fool. In this very instant, Zagan possessed no means of defeating this girl. That's all there was to it.

The power of the Seraph Hunters was certainly menacing, but that in and of itself wasn't impossible to handle. In fact, handling such unreasonable powers happened to be Zagan's specialty. The problem was their wielder. She was faster with them than Zagan was at using sorcery.

Zagan was capable of replicating a magic circle in a fraction of a second, and she was even faster than that. Even with the reaction speed of a sorcerer, he wouldn't be able to put up Heaven's Scale in time. She was fundamentally faster than the activation of sorcery itself. The speed and precision of a vampire's movements far surpassed the realm of humanity. Zagan himself specialized in reinforcing his own body, and even he would surely be incapable of keeping up.

In other words, this was an art. Even among the Archdemons, there likely didn't exist a single one who could cope with it. Even Andrealphus, who could stop time, wouldn't be able to do anything before his sorcery activated.

Archdemons, demons, Sacred Swords, celestial mysticism. Of all the powers Zagan stood against, they all used techniques which manipulated a massive amount of mana and aura. That's why he possessed no means of overcoming such a pure art.

I've never had an opponent who wields such powers to begin with.

Zagan was capable of using simple arts to an extent, but it was nothing but child's play compared to what was before his eyes. Above

all else, relying on arts as a sorcerer who had gained power already was the very height of shame to him.

Nevertheless, if she ever opposed him, he required a means of fighting. He realized full well that he still lacked the power to dominate the world. And at the same time, a certain thought crossed his mind.

Perfecting arts to such a degree is worthy of admiration.

This was an accumulation of tens, hundreds, and thousands of years of discipline. It was impossible to accomplish in a normal lifespan. It did seem weird, though, considering she was a girl who only looked slightly older than Foll, on the outside, at least.

Suddenly, the girl's eyes opened wide. Something seemed to have caught her attention, and the wine within the glass jostled greatly. Even though the glass itself didn't fall, the wine spilled onto the floor.

"Oh my, I'm honored to have attracted your gaze, my Silver-Eyed King."

The vampire Alshiera's voice was shamelessly stating, "I noticed it and it ended up throwing off my concentration," but this was just her usual behavior. She was an enemy two months ago in Liucaon, and by some whim, she was now being sheltered in Zagan's castle.

Vampires didn't sweat or breathe, but seeing her so composed after such an intense drill truly made Zagan realize that she was a monster. Her golden hair swayed in the air as she took the wine glass from atop her weapon and licked up some of the spilled wine. As for her hand holding the Seraph Hunter, it was now suddenly holding onto her usual creepy stuffed doll. Zagan didn't overlook the fact that her shadow split apart and slid away from beneath her feet as she kept up her theatrical motions.

Is she capable of splitting her body apart?

She previously spoke as if the clothes Kuroka was wearing were a part of her body. Though she wasn't currently hostile to him, it was becoming more and more apparent that he couldn't be careless around her. Zagan kept the corner of his eye on the shadow as he opened his mouth to speak.

"Does the Night Clan even require such training?"

Vampires existed on an entirely different dimension from other undead like zombies and skeletons. In a sense, they were the ideal form that all sorcerers aspired to be. And precisely because of that, sorcerers referred to them as the Night Clan out of respect.

Alshiera did not immediately reply but instead put on a self-deprecating smile.

"I haven't held these in several hundred years, after all. My skills have at least dulled to the point where I would panic a little."

Taking a closer look, the glass had cracks along its base and was

dripping liquid ever so steadily. In the last moment, though her concentration was thrown off, it seemed that she hit the glass lightly.

This is dulled? Zagan thought with a grimace.

The Seraph Hunters' powers were much like Zagan's Heaven's Phosphor in that they were unheard of powers which could obliterate their target with just a simple touch. And here she was saying that it was possible for her to use them with even more speed and precision. The reason that Alshiera was now forced to seek Zagan's aid was because she was wounded to the point where she was on the verge of "death."

"Is Shere Khan that fearsome an enemy?" Zagan asked, while remaining fully on guard.

The one targeting Alshiera was one of the Archdemons, Shere Khan. He was ranked directly after the Eldest Marchosias before the latter's untimely demise and was said to surpass even the current head of the Archdemons, Andrealphus. Such was the case, but Alshiera stood there blinking with a blank gaze.

"Shere Khan...?" She cocked her head to the side with a "who's that?" look plastered on her face. "Oh, now that you mention it, we must put a stop to that boy, now, mustn't we?"

This left Zagan puzzled.

What's going on? Is the enemy she's preparing for not Shere Khan?

Judging by her reaction, she had forgotten about his existence completely. She was fully focused on her training, but there was a saying that one should think of their enemies when preparing for battle. In other words, the enemy on this girl's mind was such a threat that even Shere Khan was worth ignoring.

Zagan crossed his arms and glared at the vampire.

"If Shere Khan isn't your enemy, then what the hell has you so on guard? With your powers as they are, even in your current state, one or two Archdemons would be nothing to you, right?"

That was how Zagan assessed her power at least. And yet, the vampire simply replied by raising her eyebrow slightly.

"Are you saying I can't ask about this either?"

"Yes. There's no need for concern, my Silver-Eyed King. I won't cause you any trouble. This is my problem to deal with."

She really was hard to handle. Zagan combed back his hair with a sigh.

"Whatever. It's my principle to deal with troublesome matters by myself. I'm not one to sit back and rely on others."

"And that's precisely what makes you the Silver-Eyed King," Alshiera replied with a giggle.

However, Zagan looked down at her menacingly.

"But I'm not so whimsical that I would shelter someone without

compensation.”

This was not a notice for her to get out. Alshiera required the facilities within Archdemon Palace to maintain her Seraph Hunters or manufacture ammunition or something. Yet it ran contrary to Zagan’s principles to throw someone out after saving them. If he were to do so, he wouldn’t have saved them in the first place.

But I’ve got my subordinates’ viewpoints to consider.

It surely wasn’t amusing for Zagan’s subordinates, who exhausted themselves for his sake, to have a sudden visitor be given the VIP treatment without having to do anything in return. In other words, this was him telling her, “If you aren’t going to provide me with information, compensate me with something else.” She surely understood this as well. Her face stiffened up, and she held up her cracked wine glass.

“Oh my, what a conundrum. Do I even have anything to compensate you with, I wonder?”

“Yeah, you do. If you won’t speak, then you can just use your body, right?”

Alshiera didn’t seem to have expected such a reply, and she stiffened up.

“Meaning...?”

“So you don’t even understand such things without it being spelled out for you?” Zagan said in astonishment with a sigh. He then thrust his finger towards her. “Isn’t it obvious that I’m telling you to help Nephy with her chores?”

This was fundamentally the job of all residents of this castle who weren’t sorcerers. Thinking back on it, this was also Foll’s first punishment, but it was unexpectedly quite useful for Nephy. This was also the path the Archangel Chastille took when she was temporarily staying at the castle. Selphy was also given the same job. And so was Lilith, who also served as a mediator with Liucaon.

Alshiera simply stared back, wide-eyed, having no idea what she was being told.

“Huh? Chores...? You mean... cooking, cleaning, and such?”

“Exactly. Having said that, the kitchen has enough hands. So you’ll be left with cleaning.”

The vampire was still having trouble swallowing the situation and was just standing there blinking and staring. Her expression was one truly befitting her childlike appearance.

“What’s that? You’re not planning on claiming that someone as noble as you is incapable of cleaning, are you?”

That’s how Lilith had resisted at first.

“No, that’s not the case, but... um, is that sufficient?”

“You won’t tell me anything. You possess no knowledge of

sorcery. So what else can you even do?"

"That's... certainly true. But... are you not an Archdemon?"

"Is it that strange for an Archdemon to order you to clean?"

"According to my intuition, quite so..." Alshiera said, but she shook her head upon thinking it over. "No, I suppose it's strange for an Archdemon, but not for the Silver-Eyed King. That's just what I would want you to say."

She smiled with a somehow nostalgic expression, leaving Zagan with a strange sense of discomfort.

It's the same as that time during Alshiere Imera.

It felt like this girl was overlaying someone known as the Silver-Eyed King with Zagan, and she had a tendency to phrase things as if she was hoping he would become more like someone else.

"Hmmm," Zagan said with a nod, "let me ask you one thing. How many people out there have you called Silver-Eyed King?"

The expression she made at the time wasn't one that he would forget quite so easily. It was happy, sad, shaken, anguished, and yet it looked like she was saved. Her expression was filled with emotions. He'd only seen this expression from her once before, back when he had asked her about Azazel. Her reaction back then had been a little different, but her expression now was nothing like her normally flippant attitude.

I guess it really is something she doesn't want to answer?

Zagan wasn't so insensitive that he would continue to forcefully pry into the private lives of others, no matter how much he disliked them. Well, it was somewhat laughable for a sorcerer of all things to worry about being sensitive.

"I don't really mind if you don't want to answer."

Just as Zagan offered to withdraw, Alshiera tightly squeezed her stuffed doll and shook her head.

"...No. It's something... that I would like you to hear."

It was the first time she'd ever said anything like that. This was unexpected for Zagan, too, and he nodded back to her, even as he stared in wonder.

"Up until now, there have been three people worthy of being called the Silver-Eyed King by me."

"Three?"

One would be Zagan, and another was the Silver-Eyed King passed down in Liucaon's legends.

So who's the last one?

This vampire had lived for hundreds of years now. It was only natural to think that there was another during the time between the Silver-Eyed King of legend and Zagan. In any case, was that last Silver-Eyed King the source of the discomfort that Zagan felt? Alshiera

simply smiled in a lonely manner, and didn't speak any further.

"Whatever," Zagan replied with a shake of his head. "I'll keep that in mind. In any case, it's time for breakfast."

Quite some time had passed since Nephry had come to get Zagan. If they were to linger any longer, the food would get cold. What's more, Zagan had other business to attend to today. And with that, Alshiera picked at the hem of her skirt as she curtsied.

"All is as you will, my Silver-Eyed King."

And giving her a glance from the side, Zagan recalled another certain individual.

Does Marc also possess this level of power?

He was once Zagan's childhood friend, the one who had taught him arts as well as everything he needed to survive. He was also the man Alshiera had identified as the one who would lead him to Azazel. Zagan had heard that he'd once possessed the Seraph Hunters. He had simply received that clue, and he'd yet to get more information from the man who was most familiar with the details.



Alshiera unexpectedly seemed to enjoy her meal. Though, Raphael had a somewhat stern look because she was constantly requesting refills for wine, which was a poor influence on Foll's upbringing. The butler was making the expression of some man-eating fiend, but the residents of the castle had already gotten fairly used to it by now. As for the little girl in question, Foll was simply staring fixedly at Raphael and observing him.

And so, after having an enjoyable breakfast with that as a sideshow, Zagan returned to the throne room, where he spotted a girl who was waiting for him idly.

"Um, Your Highness?"

"Lilith? What is it?"

She had red hair tied up on both sides of her head, along with twisting black horns. Her refined face was accentuated by her golden eyes, and she had bat-like wings sprouting from her back. This was Lilith, the princess of the succubi.



Her golden eyes and twisting horns were features that one could see on fomorians like Gremory. The succubi possessed the power to see dreams, while the fomorians had the power to destroy anything they looked at. It was identified that long ago the two of them were very closely related races who both possessed magical eyes.

Thinking back on it, he hadn't seen her during breakfast.

Oh yeah, this girl resembles Alshiera too, doesn't she? It was curious how even though Gremory and Alshiera didn't bear the slightest resemblance, this girl had features that were common to one or the other. He only began thinking about this again because of his little exchange with the vampire in the morning, but he suddenly realized that something was strange about Lilith's state. Her usual strong-willed face was now completely pale. It appeared that she wasn't only afraid but also in poor health.

Well, I guess everyone around her is a sorcerer and all. She did have her best friend, Selphy, with her, but as a sorcerer himself, Zagan couldn't understand much about the anxieties of a commoner mixed into the middle of a bunch of sorcerers.

He continued walking towards his throne and snapped his fingers. One of the chairs along the wall slid across the ground on its own and placed itself behind Lilith. She stood there wide-eyed for a moment, and Zagan lightly waved his hand to her.

"Sit down. I can't have you collapsing in the middle of our conversation."

"Th-Thank you."

"So, what do you need?"

Lilith plopped down into the chair, finding it hard to speak.

She's awfully timid for such a strong-willed girl... Even now, it seemed she was afraid of speaking one-on-one with an Archdemon. But nevertheless, she had clearly gathered her resolve, so she would surely begin speaking on her own. Zagan simply sat there, staring at her without pressing her to hurry, and waited for her to speak.

And before long, having gotten her thoughts in order, Lilith timidly opened her mouth.

"Actually... this morning... I saw a scary dream... W-Wait! Th-That's not what I mean! Um, I guess it somewhat is, but it isn't..."

"I got it, so calm down and try telling me about it."

Zagan tried his best not to scare her more than she already was, and Lilith writhed about with enough bashfulness that it seemed like steam would start coming out of her head.

"You might just laugh it off as nothing but a dream... but I saw something strange. I was in a place like a temple, but there was no ceiling, yet no sky. There was nobody, yet I could tell that something

dreadful was there..." Lilith reminisced over the peculiar scenery she saw as her molars clattered. "It was... as if..." She hesitated. As if afraid to put it into words. But even so, she mustered her courage. "The world ended there. That's what it felt like."

This left Zagan quite surprised. As a sorcerer, it was only normal to think that dreams possessed no power. However, seeing the future in them was said to be a miracle since ancient times. It was difficult to laugh it off as superstition when the princess of the succubi was speaking of such things. So Zagan began carefully asking her more about it.

"The end of the world is an awfully ominous way of putting it. Was it some sort of prophetic vision?"

"I wonder...? It might be, but I don't think that's what it was."

"Hmmm. Let's hear your basis for believing that."

It seemed that Zagan's choice of words was a little off because Lilith began faltering and looked around the room.

It doesn't sound like it's just her imagination, though. That was why he wanted to ask her if she had any ideas about what it was.

"Basis...? Oh, right." Lilith suddenly looked up at Zagan. "Um, I don't know if it's that strong a basis, but I was saved by My Lady in that dream."

"Your Lady? Alshiera?"

"Yes... Oh, but I didn't see her face. I just think that's probably who it was."

Zagan recalled what happened in the morning.

Now that I think of it, she was strangely perturbed for an instant in the middle of her training... And at that moment, Zagan had seen a shadow flying away from her. He didn't know exactly when Lilith had woken up, but the probability that Alshiera had used her shadow to intervene in some way was fairly high.

"If that was her, then rather than a prophetic dream, it was more like I was in the 'now.' Like it was closer to reality..."

"I see..." Zagan nodded, and at the same time, a new doubt came to mind. "So Alshiera is even capable of intervening in dreams?"

He only meant to mumble that to himself, but Lilith replied shyly nonetheless.

"About that... Your Highness, have you ever seen her put down her hair?"

Zagan cocked his head at the unexpected question.

"No, I haven't."

Even when he saw her on the uninhabited island near Liucaon, her disheveled hair was still tied up. He never really questioned it, but Lilith's voice sounded fully convinced of something.

"Actually, I feel like I've seen a similar dream before. Back then,

there was another person there who had the same horns as me..." She hesitated slightly, unsure whether it was alright to speak of it further, but her silence didn't last long. "I think maybe that was My Lady, with her hair let down..."

Meaning Alshiera was originally a succubus, and her hair and ribbons may have been hiding her horns. It was difficult to imagine how horns of that size could be hidden, though. This was rather unexpected, but Zagan found himself strangely convinced of this fact.

"Is that so? I suppose it isn't all that strange for her to be a succubus who became a vampire."

The number of succubi that had become sorcerers throughout history wasn't all that insignificant. Zagan had also witnessed Alshiera manipulating wings made of shadows while she fought. He thought at the time that this was an ability characteristic to the Night Clan though.

But what does that mean? Alshiera was one to conceal everything about herself at any cost. It was fortuitous that he'd happened across information about her true identity, but he couldn't guess what meaning that held. And once more, a dot had been placed in completely unknown territory. Just what did that dot connect to?

Zagan folded his arms and let out a groan.

"I can't really say much based on that information alone, but the place you saw in your dream probably wasn't a dream. Would that make it something like Alshiera's space...?"

Among sorcerers, there were those capable of making their own sort of subspace. This happened to be Barbatos' field of specialty. In that case, maybe succubi could create a similar sort of private space within dreams.

Lilith touched her lips as if worrying over the matter.

"Her own space... No, if pushed to say it, it was more like she was protecting that place..." And after sinking into silence for a moment, Lilith continued in a clear tone. "To me, it felt more like she was the guardian of that place."

"A guardian...?"

That word left Zagan somewhat taken aback.

No, hang on... it's not impossible when it comes to her...

Zagan continued to put his thoughts in order as he replied.

"Your conjecture might just be on the mark."

"How so?"

"Let's see... You may not know of this, having only left Liucaon recently, but have you ever felt that this world is awfully confined?"

"Huh? Confined...? Is there something out there across the ocean?"

That was exactly it. The only large landmass was the one called

the continent. Everything else was ocean. The only exception was Liucaon. No other continent or country had ever been confirmed.

“Hmm, let’s start from the beginning. Lilith, have you ever heard of the theory that this world exists atop a sphere?”

“Yes. It’s the theory that the world is round and spins in circles, right?”

As one would expect of royalty, she did at least possess that level of education. It helped that his explanation would be able to proceed more quickly.

“Exactly. So sorcerers wanted to know exactly how big that sphere was. And several of them calculated the size of the world.”

“You can even figure out things like that with sorcery?”

“It isn’t all that complicated. If you investigate the amount of time it takes for the sun and moon to pass straight overhead at two separate points, you can measure the distance based on the difference. It’s possible to do even if you aren’t a sorcerer, given enough motivation. Well, it does require a fair amount of time and effort though.”

Sorcery itself was something anybody could use as long as they possessed the knowledge, so Zagan didn’t think of it as particularly special.

“According to their calculations, the continent is apparently no bigger than a tenth of the entire world. Well, that’s just how worlds are. There are measurement errors that come from estimating it like that, but apparently, they aren’t that far off.”

After multiple calculations, an average value was bound to appear. And none of those calculations deviated much from the average value.

Lilith sat there, blinking in surprise.

“A tenth? Then is the remaining 90 percent all ocean?”

“Who knows? But it’s true that nobody has ever discovered any other land,” Zagan said as he stared at Lilith. “Isn’t it strange? Do you really think sorcerers didn’t have any interest in the world beyond this continent, despite living for hundreds of years? There must have been more than just one or two sorcerers who made full use of their sorcery and set off on boats searching for more to the world. And yet nobody ever found anything.”

That was why the world felt too confined. Yet Lilith cocked her head, unable to grasp what she was being told.

“But sorcery is capable of leaping through space, right? There’s that one unhealthy one among your friends who can do that, right?”

She was right on the mark. It was precisely Barbatos’ field of expertise. In theory, that man was capable of going anywhere in the world. There was a risk to leaping into the unknown though, so he

couldn't actually do it.

However, Zagan shook his head.

"Apparently that doesn't work. There may have been those who succeeded in doing so, but none of them returned. Or perhaps they failed and were forced back onto the continent before they could get out."

"That means..."

Zagan nodded.

"Seems the continent is enclosed in a small cage of sorts."

Perhaps what lay beyond was the next world, where the dragons and ancient gods went. That was why this was one topic that sorcerers racked their brains over for many years. But after hearing Lilith's story, Zagan found a different answer to said question.

Lilith simply sat there, dumbfounded, and Zagan continued his explanation.

"Well, we went off track a little. Let's get back to the place you saw in your dream. After hearing about that, I feel like the place you saw is something like 'the edge of the world.'"

Or perhaps it was something like the keystone which sealed the cage.

"The edge... of the world..."

Having come to some sort of realization, Lilith pinned down her meager chest. If Alshiera was protecting that place, it could adequately explain the necessity of her having no choice but to leave Liucaon despite her tremendous power. It also gave a hint as to why such a cage was built around the world.

Zagan looked down at his right hand, at the Sigil of the Archdemon.

It makes sense if the Demon Lord and even the demons themselves were all sealed away along with this entire world.

One thousand years ago, there was an incident that saw the extinction of many races. The one to bring that about was likely the Demon Lord. Also, its residual thoughts, as well as demons, could easily be brought out here. And above all else was the fact that the Demon Lord was sealed within the Sigils of the Archdemon.

That may have been deemed insufficient in sealing away a calamity that could destroy the world itself. That's likely why they chose somewhere special, like a dream, to serve as the key or door to that seal.

If that were the case, then it would explain Alshiera's particular fixation with Lilith among those three girls from Liucaon. And if this were true, then it would all lead to one conclusion.

In short, Alshiera is a deterrent against the Demon Lord...?

With the Seraph Hunters in hand, Alshiera's powers were already

far beyond human intellect. Even as he was now, it would be tremendously difficult for Zagan to defeat her in a head-on confrontation. Nevertheless, she was panicking.

Perhaps... there isn't that much time left. Alshiera had already suffered a fatal wound. She was granted the slightest lease on life — though it was questionable whether such a term was appropriate — because of the blood of an Archdemon she drank. But she surely didn't possess much more time. In the worst case, Zagan had to at least become as strong as Alshiera to oppose the Demon Lord.

Well, if it's just a simple manner of killing Alshiera, then there are ways of accomplishing it. If he wasn't all that picky about his means, then it was in fact possible. But there was a priority to all things. Zagan's number one priority was protecting Nephy and Foll's tranquil life. He would gladly throw away what little pride he had for such a cause. This was simply a clash of priorities, so he hadn't killed her. If the time came where there was no longer any advantage to keeping her alive, he would do it.

However, Nephy surely wouldn't wish for that. That was why he looked for a more amicable solution. In the end, gaining more strength himself was the quickest and easiest way to solve everything.

But it's probably better to have some insurance in place.

Zagan put the information in his head together and addressed Lilith once more.

"Lilith. If you ever see the same dream again, investigate the place as best as you can. Anything is fine. Just bring back any information you can get."

"...Understood." And even as the blood splendidly drained from her face, Lilith nodded firmly.

"However, doing so will surely be accompanied by a suitable amount of danger. If that truly is the edge of the world, that means there's something out there that would be quite the bother if it crossed over. So..." Zagan continued in a grave tone. "What you should prioritize above all else is your own survival."

Lilith stared back at him blankly.

"Huh? Survival...?"

"Yeah. I don't care how. It doesn't matter what you sacrifice. I, or one of my subordinates, will definitely come save you. So survive even a second longer at any cost. The dead are beyond saving, after all."

Zagan tried to convey this in an easy to understand way, but Lilith still looked completely astonished.

"You'll... come save me?"

"Of course. Just who will follow a king who can't protect his own subordinates?"

And with that, Lilith finally returned a vigorous nod.

“...Okay. Understood. I’ll survive, no matter what.”

“Mm. Very good.” Zagan nodded, and Lilith smiled in a somewhat relieved manner.

“Hey, Your Highness?”

“What?”

“Umm... Thanks for listening to me seriously. Honestly... I thought you would make fun of me.”

Zagan had been curious about what had made her so anxious up until now and let out an exasperated sigh.

“I can at least tell at a glance whether or not you’re trying to mess with me. Don’t worry about such trivial matters. If anything else strange happens to you, report it down to the very last detail.”

“Mm. I’ll do just that.” She smiled again, and then suddenly remember something else. “Hey, Your Highness?”

“What?”

“I never met him before, but was Lord Marchosias like you?”

Zagan knit his brows, wondering why Marchosias’ name popped up.

Oh yeah. Marchosias was also Liucaon’s protector. It was important information, but for some reason, the Eldest didn’t leave any records behind about himself. Even Zagan, who had inherited his entire legacy, still had no idea what sort of person he was. And yet, it was mysterious how he kept hearing that name everywhere he went. Well, that in itself wasn’t all that strange considering he was an Archdemon who lived for a thousand years.

Zagan shook his head.

“Like I know. I’ve never met him either.”

“Is that so...? That’s a little disappointing. Well, there’s plenty of sorcerers here, so wouldn’t some of them have been acquainted?”

“Are you going to look for one? Give it up. Prying into the lives of sorcerers is just begging for trouble.”

Sorcerers were villains, after all. They would snap back immediately if suspected of something without a cause. This girl was under Zagan’s protection, but someone who went around poking their head into trouble all on their own couldn’t be protected.

“Okay.”

It was like Lilith hadn’t had any intention of seriously poking around. She withdrew without any complaints and headed back to her room.

But... I guess I’d also like to investigate Marchosias a little. Ever since he began chasing the name Azazel, it felt like Marchosias’ name was following him around everywhere. He hadn’t made any progress whatsoever up until now, but it may have been worth giving Archdemon Palace another look over.

At the time, that was still all he really thought of this matter.



Several days ago, during Alshiere Imera, the cait sith Kuroka became a cat, and an incident took place where a flood of failed undead poured into town. The first to realize who the culprit was behind the incident was a sorcerer named Shax. He was a former disciple of Archdemon Shere Khan and currently Zagan's subordinate.

It wasn't clear what he looked up to in Shere Khan, but the healing sorcery he used was something he originally studied under that Archdemon. And while he was under the belief that he could save somebody with it, Shere Khan attacked Kuroka's home.

The rare species hunt, the incident Shere Khan perpetrated five years ago. Following that, Shax guided the former Archdemon Marchosias' subordinate who took action to purge Shere Khan. And thus, Shere Khan was reduced to a cripple who couldn't possibly recover. The power which reduced the Archdemon to such a state was the Seraph Hunters.

During the incident the other day, Shax took action to protect Kuroka and Alshiera so that the tragedy five years ago would not repeat itself.

“—And that's pretty much all I have to report.”

Shortly after Lilith returned to her room, the next to visit Zagan at his throne to report such details was a young sorcerer. His outward appearance was that of a man in his mid-twenties, but he was still a talented sorcerer right below the level of an Archdemon candidate. He had sloppy long hair and a stubbly beard. He was actually fairly tall, but his slumped posture took away any dignity or impact he had. He looked like a battered young man, but Zagan assessed him as one of the top five sorcerers in the continent when it came to healing sorcery. This was Zagan's subordinate Shax, who was normally stationed at the church.

This man held the biggest clue as to Marc's whereabouts, but due to a few ongoing issues, Zagan hadn't had a chance to ask him about it when he found this out. One reason was because this trusted subordinate of his wanted to be placed by Kuroka's side at the church, seeing that she was the one being targeted. The other reason was that since those two were getting closer, her foster father Raphael showed an unusual amount of anger towards him.

During the incident on Alshiere Imera, it was like all concerned parties of the rare species hunt five years ago were gathered in town once more.

It's natural to think they were gathered together by someone's will...
But Zagan believed this was actually all by coincidence. He thought

maybe it was just good fortune that brought those who needed to be saved here so that they could be saved.

The reason for that was because the girl at the center of the incident was a cait sith, who were said to be the most blessed fairies in the world. That was why he believed that perhaps her prayer to move forward and affirm herself brought everyone together. That's because there was a need for everyone involved five years ago to gather together for her to take that step forward.

If that's the case, then I guess that's another form of mysticism.

Mysticism was capable of manifesting miracles through nothing but a prayer. Only high elves could properly utilize that ability, but the cait sith possessed a similar power that was far more unstable. In a sense, it was somewhat like a curse.

Or perhaps it was, in fact, a curse. Kuroka was basically completely unrelated to good fortune during her everyday life. This could be explained by the power being too much for her own body, causing a backlash.

That's probably the power that Shere Khan was targeting... Which was why Zagan couldn't allow anybody to know about it. He wouldn't pay so much attention to a complete stranger, but Kuroka was Raphael's adopted daughter. And a daughter of that loyal butler could be said to be someone just as important to protect as Nephys and Foll. So Zagan had one more important person under his care.

"Shere Khan..."

A tigryn Archdemon.

If I remember right, back when I inherited the Sigil of the Archdemon, a therianthrope sorcerer was sitting in a wheelchair.

The Archdemons were all wearing robes, so it was difficult to see their faces. But therianthropes stood out either way. He wasn't sure whether that was the face of a tiger, but he didn't see any other therianthropes there.

"Hmm, I've also heard stories that Shere Khan was purged by Marchosias..." Zagan said as he nodded to himself.

It was something that happened when Zagan was around thirteen years old, just when he began gaining power as a sorcerer. After knocking out Barbatos, who hadn't learned his lesson despite this being a monthly occurrence and had come to pick a fight, he was told about it while they shared drinks.

Back then, the thought of Archdemons had been far away from both of them, so he hadn't considered it to be relevant to him at the time.

Zagan pulled out a pair of worn-out glasses from his pocket. Shax said that he didn't remember that person's face or name, but the hazy impression left in his mind was of a man wearing round glasses. They

were antiques with a cracked lens and rusted frame, but Shax's eyes shot open when Zagan showed them to him.

"So Marchosias' subordinate that you guided five years ago wore these?"

"Yeah, I'm sure... At least I think I am."

His response implied that his memories of the time were rather vague, but the reaction he had upon seeing them made Zagan believe he genuinely recognized them.

"Why are you looking for him, Boss?"

"...Because he was a man I called my friend."

Though, it was rather heartless that Zagan hadn't even given him a thought until recently.

No, that's not quite right...

He thought he was unconsciously driving the two of them out of his mind due to the incident with his other childhood friend Stella, but that may not have been the case. Every single person he met who may have known Marc said the same thing, as if the story had been arranged beforehand.

"I feel like I might know him, but it may be my imagination."

There were even Archdemon candidates who said the same thing, so it was quite abnormal. It was especially unthinkable for Shax, who spent the last five years in regret after meeting the man. It was as if the world itself was trying to forget Marc's existence.

I bet that's actually what it is.

This was a curse. Though it was somewhat insignificant, Zagan suffered from a curse himself, so he could tell. It was a variation of a curse that could bend the very laws of the world, which sorcery could not heal.

Zagan looked over to Shax once more.

"Let me ask you again. What happened to him in the end?"

He was already told the outcome. Shax's report sorted out all the main points. Any sorcerer would be able to fully understand everything he said after hearing it once.

However, Zagan felt compelled to confirm it one more time. His expression was surely quite severe. Shax stepped back in fear, but he opened his mouth to speak nonetheless.

"He traded blows with Shere Khan... and they struck each other down... That's what I think I saw."

That was why the Seraph Hunters he possessed were in Alshiera's hands.

Zagan clenched his teeth tightly.

Marc was the one to purge Shere Khan... And after trading blows with the Archdemon, he died. Zagan had thought of this possibility ever since he'd been handed the glasses. He knew that Marc may not

in fact be alive anymore. But even so, after reuniting with Stella, he had hoped that he would also be able to meet Marc once more. And that brittle hope crumbled to pieces. It felt like his head would boil over with rage, but he took a deep breath and calmed himself down.

"I do have a guess as to what happened to Marc," Zagan stated.

"...Which is?"

"They say that those who incur the wrath of an Archdemon have their very existence erased. If this doesn't just refer to the annihilation of one's entire bloodline, then it means that some sort of sorcery... or curse, exists which can do just that."

This might have been knowledge that only Archdemons possessed.

"Meaning there's sorcery... or by your guess a curse, which is capable of erasing someone's existence from other people's... or perhaps the world's memory?" Shax stated as he put his hand to his chin and ruminated over the hypothesis.

"That's what I hypothesize, but it does seem appropriate."

"But curses can't be managed with sorcery, right? Can you really accomplish that by being an Archdemon?"

Just as he said, curses were a calamity which even sorcery could do nothing about. That was why Zagan and Andrealphus both sought out Liucaon for other means of dealing with them. And yet, Zagan shook his head.

"Curses are infectious. If we think of the foundation of the curse being in the Sigil, then it would be easy to infect Marc with it."

Doing so was already well beyond the realm of simple sorcerers, but with the power of an Archdemon, it was entirely possible. Shax didn't look fully convinced, but nodded anyway.

"Well, if you say so, Boss. You got a reason for thinking so, right?"

This guy's an idiot, but he's still talented I see. He was devastatingly poor at reading the atmosphere and maintaining his relationships, but he was quick on his feet. He didn't just digest what Zagan had to say, he built up a theory on top of that and came to a conclusion of his own.

Zagan leaned back against his chair and looked up at the ceiling.

"Kimaris reported something to me... You've seen the Seraph Hunters, right?"

"Yeah."

"According to him, three people worked together to make them. Alshiera, Eldest Marchosias, and one other."

"Hang on a sec, Marchosias...? Who exactly is that girl?" Shax asked as he stared in wonder at the mention of that name.

Now that he thought of it, Zagan only introduced Alshiera as a guest who happened to be a vampire. Shax was supposed to have cooperated with her for a while, but he still didn't seem to know who

she was.

“Well, I’ll tell you one day if the need for it comes. That third person is the important matter right now.”

“Did the little missy not say who it was?”

“Apparently she did tell Kimaris. And he heard her clearly...” Zagan paused briefly there and stared at Shax once more before saying, “But he can’t remember.”

“S-So that means?”

“Doesn’t it sound similar to the phenomenon around Marc?”

Was the source behind it Shere Khan’s curse? Or perhaps...

That third person is Marc himself...?

If that were the case, that young man would have been alive for several hundred years by the time he met Zagan. He didn’t really want to consider the possibility, but it also couldn’t be discarded at this point.

At the very least, there was a clear connection between Marchosias and Marc. He was, in fact, the one who was sent out to execute Marchosias’ purge.

If Marc was the third person to help create the Seraph Hunters, it could explain his connection to Marchosias.

The dots are starting to connect...

According to what Alshiera said, Marc’s entire life was related to Azazel. And that same man possessed the Seraph Hunters and possibly lent a hand in creating them. With that in mind, it was entirely possible that Azazel was one of the seraphs that Marchosias obliterated.

Seraphs. A name that no longer existed in the world. Another existence brought to ruin by an Archdemon. Furthermore, when Zagan had asked Alshiera about it...

“It’s not that I won’t answer or that I don’t want to answer. I cannot answer you.”

If answering was related to the curse cast on Marc, then he could understand why she was unable to answer at the time. Though he still didn’t know how it was all related to himself and Nephy.

No... I guess we’re already involved.

That was why the vampire had asked him not to chase after it.

“But that being the case...” Zagan mumbled to himself.

I won’t be able to do things with Nephy that normal lovers do no matter how much time passes!

Their talks of Marc were naturally getting to him, but Marc was still the man who had taught Zagan how to survive. It wasn’t like he was killed through cowardly means while filled with regret. He challenged an Archdemon. He must have had the will to do so. Going for revenge in such a case was just barking up the wrong tree.

This matter with Nephy was far more unforgivable. When was the last time he had even embraced her? He'd wanted to hug her with all his heart that evening during Alshire Imera when they exchanged presents, but it didn't go his way.

Ever since then, Nephy had been busy because of Kuroka's request to have her eyes healed, and Zagan himself had to deal with becoming Shere Khan's target. So it was difficult to have some private time just between them. He was, of course, able to have a frivolous conversation with her just like he did in the morning. But that wasn't the lover-like things that Zagan wanted to do with her.

I want to run my fingers through her silky hair and touch her ears and see her be all embarrassed and have her sit on my lap and rub my cheeks against her and hug her and take a stroll through a park while holding hands and walk through town and have her feed me and sleep together and have another kiss!

His sheer anger made his vision go red, and it felt like the blood in his eyes would burst into tears. He thought that since he wasn't able to find any clues about Marc, things would calm down and he could go on another date. But Shere Khan popped up right at that time, and now things were busy again.

Indeed. This was all Shere Khan's fault.

Zagan didn't care if he was the second strongest, or if he had escaped death, or whatever. That sorcerer was now right next to Bifrons as Zagan's sworn enemy, a nemesis that had to be annihilated even at the cost of his own life.

"Damn you, Shere Khan... I will never forgive you! I'll chase you to the very ends of the earth and make you curse your misfortune for having survived five years ago...!"

As a matter of fact, it wasn't really Shere Khan's fault, but due to Zagan's personality, this was an inevitable conclusion. He unintentionally put all his strength into his hands and crushed the stone armrests of his throne.

And having sensed such raw anger from him, Shax gulped loudly.

"Uh... Hey, Boss? Actually..."

"...What?"

Shax still had something to say. It wasn't really his fault or anything, and Zagan was trying to be as gentle as possible, but his voice was still trembling with rage.

"N-No, it's nothing. No need to trouble you over it, Boss..."

"...Hm? Is that so?"

He didn't really get it, but he realized he might have made things a little awkward for Shax.

Well, if it's truly a problem, I guess he'll come tell me about it later.

This man wasn't foolish enough to keep quiet when it was better

for him to look for help.

And so, his talented subordinate left Zagan behind atop his crumbling throne.



After leaving the throne room, Shax suddenly fell to his knees, sweating profusely.

I didn't think the boss would be so pissed...

It only stood to reason though. Even if he was Shax's former teacher, Shere Khan's actions were unforgivable. That was why Shax had betrayed his teacher and guided Marchosias' purge on him. He knew this, which is why he couldn't cut to the chase of what he really wanted to consult Zagan about.

Shax pulled a card from his breast pocket. Or more specifically, he pulled a "certain something" out in the shape of a card.

"What should I do with Kurosuke's clothes...?"

During the incident on Alshire Imera, Shax ended up picking up Kuroka, who had turned into a cat. At the time, he only thought she was a cat, so he picked up the clothes he found at the same time thinking they may be a clue to find her owner.

That was thoughtless of him though. A sorcerer secretly carrying around a young woman's clothing, which had traces of being used, was obviously evidence of a crime that anyone could identify.

I'm dead if old man Raphael finds out I have these...

He would definitely be killed. Without a doubt. It was possible Raphael would at least hear out his will, but his death would be determined. Even if he ran to the very ends of the earth, he would get killed. Not even Zagan could protect him.

The thought of returning Kuroka's clothes to her room secretly did cross his mind.

That won't do, she'll totally notice my scent.

Her sense of smell and her hearing were terrifyingly sharp precisely because she'd lost her eyesight. Even if he used sorcery to erase any hint of smell, there was still a risk that he would leave behind some sort of trace she could follow.

It was possible she would understand Shax's circumstances, but that girl also had a vulpin roommate named Kuu. That one was definitely a chatterbox. It was clear as day that she would tell everyone about it before her and Kuroka could come to a proper understanding.

Betting on Kuroka's ability to read the situation was far too large a risk. It was actually more normal for a girl to shrink back or be afraid of a man she just met holding onto her clothes, including her underwear.

She was someone that Shax had to protect even if he had to stake his life on it. He couldn't possibly let her experience such a thing. But above all else, if Kuroka was to find out, there was a fairly high probability that Raphael would hear of it.

Nevertheless, it wasn't like he could just dispose of them. He vaguely recalled hearing that those clothes were something precious that she had received from her benefactor. Just how sad would she be if she found out they were disposed of? There was a need to somehow get them back in her hands.

That was why he wanted to consult Zagan about it, considering he likely possessed the ability to settle things peacefully. However, given his rage, it seemed inappropriate at the time.

And as Shax racked his brain over this...

"Mister Shax? Is something wrong?" A cat-eared girl peered at his face with curiosity. Well, she wasn't really peering. She just brought her face closer. Nothing was actually reflected in her eyes.

She had pitch-black hair and triangular ears of the same color. And yet she also had human ears to the side. Her hollow eyes were crimson, and she was still wearing the black dress she'd had on during Alshire Imera. It was none other than Kuroka, who was supposed to be at the church.

Shax hid her clothes in a panic.

"K-Kurosuke? Why are you here?"

"Why? Didn't I tell you I was going to have my eyes healed? So, I came here for Lady Nephy to have a look."

Her comment stirred his memory. Kuroka's eyes were impossible to heal with sorcery. However, it was entirely possible that Zagan's bride, Nephy, could pull it off, and Kuroka had finally resolved to attempt the treatment.

"You came to have her take a look? On your own? Ain't that kinda dangerous? This castle is full of sorcerers, right?"

"I'm a friend of the lord here, so I don't think it's all that dangerous..."

"Don't be so naïve. It might be kinda hard for you to ask, but next time ask someone to give me a call. I'll come along with you..."

And for some reason, Kuroka puffed out her cheeks in discontent.

"...What are you even saying? I thought to call for you, but you're the one who's been avoiding me, haven't you?"

Shax's body stiffened up with a twitch.

Oh yeah, I've been so desperate to hide her clothes that I might've been making sure we didn't see each other...

Kuroka squinted her red eyes and sniffed at the air.

"Also, didn't you hide something just now?"

Her senses were far sharper than his. She'd managed to find the

clothes by scent alone.

“Uhh, umm, anyway, you’re still wearing that dress, huh?! I think it suits you!”

“R-Really...?”

He forcibly changed the topic and Kuroka’s expression softened up ever so slightly. She shyly fiddled with the hem of her clothing for a few seconds, but then she made a somewhat odd expression.

“I was told to wear these as much as I can for some reason. I don’t really get it, but is there maybe some sort of sorcery cast on it?”

“Did the boss say that? I wonder what that’s about? It doesn’t look like there’s any sort of sorcery cast on it though.”

Shax strained his eyes to take a closer look, and Kuroka’s cute little face turned bright red.

“Hm? What’s up?”

“Wh-Wh-Wh-What? Um...”

After cocking his head, he noticed that he was rather close to her face while observing her clothes. It was his instinct as a sorcerer to want to probe further into the secret, since Zagan was the one who fixated on this. That Archdemon’s spells were jaw-droppingly delicate and precisely detailed, after all.

Oh crap. Doesn’t it look like I’m trying to get a look at her tits?

Objectively speaking, he looked completely guilty of taking a peek at a blind girl’s breasts. And the moment he noticed his careless action, he could hear metal clanking behind him.

“Hmm. My apologies. I meant to come receive you, but it seems I’m too late.”

Shax turned around and found an old butler smiling at him like a gentle old man. This man was already in his fifties with white hair, but even so, his back was arched straight back. His posture and bearing made it feel like he hadn’t aged a bit. He had a gruesome scar running across his face, and his left arm was a boorish looking artificial arm made from armor. This was Raphael, a former Archangel, Zagan’s current butler, and Kuroka’s foster father. The palm of his artificial arm was split open, and the hilt of a sword could be seen poking out of it.

“Eek! Hang on a sec, chief! This is a misunderstanding! I wasn’t, um, this is...”

“Worry not. There’s no need for excuses for what I am about to do. I shall content myself with my liege’s punishment, so feel free to depart on your journey.”

“Do you really have to work up courage just to kill someone like me?!”

Shax wailed on the verge of tears, and Kuroka placed herself between him and the old man.

“It really is a misunderstanding, father. I had Mister Shax come here today to be my chaperone. It’d be troubling if he disappeared.”

“Urgh...”

It seemed he was unable to put on a strong front with his adopted daughter saying that. His right hand was trembling while still gripping the hilt of his sword, but after a short while, he gave up and let out a deep sigh.

“...You’ve become quite the adult in the time I haven’t seen you.”

Raphael returned his artificial arm to normal, moved to tears by his daughter’s growth. He then pointed a terrific smile at Shax.

“Shax. You’ll do well to drop by my room later. I’ll allow you to enjoy your last supper.”

Oh, nope. He’s really not planning on letting me outta this alive.

Shax began trembling, and Kuroka let out a curious laugh.

“Okay. Have a good talk with him, he’s an upstanding person.”

“Hang on, Kurosuke. How did you come to the conclusion that we’re gonna have a nice little chat?”

When did she become such an optimist? And now that Shax was dizzy at the thought that his life was over, Raphael let out a snort.

“Hmph. I admit you have a chivalrous spirit. However, that’s a different matter from allowing such shameless behavior.”

“That’s... well... it was a bit embarrassing...” Kuroka strained a smile as Raphael left.

I’m... saved? For now? I guess? Shax stood there dumbfounded as Kuroka tried to cheer him up.

“Come on. We’re heading over to see Lady Nephy, so please stand up. You’ll escort me, right?”

“R-Right...”

After somehow getting him back to his feet, Kuroka squinted her eyes as if to glare at him.

“But I don’t intend on being protected by someone who has no worth in being killed, you know?”

“Huh? What’s this about?” Shax cocked his head, and Kuroka put her hand to her brow in exhaustion.

“...Well, even if there wasn’t that incident from five years ago, that’s just the kind of person you are, I suppose.”

“What’re you going on about?”

“It just means I also have to put in some effort.”

“Huh...? That so? If you’ve got something on your mind, feel free to tell me about it. I’ll gladly give you any advice I can.” Having this girl be able to live her life with a smile was Shax’s form of atonement. Or perhaps, it could even be said to be the very meaning of his life. “...Haaah. I at least get that I’ve got a whole lotta work to put in I guess.”

“It seems Lady Nephy should be in the kitchen at this time.”

Shax followed her to the kitchen, somewhat incredulous about that information, and unexpectedly found Nephy exactly where Kuroka claimed she was. Taking a look around, he could see Raphael and a siren wearing servant's clothing alongside the elf who was carrying tableware around. There was even a young girl with dragon horns and a lion-faced sorcerer running about. Upon closer inspection, the vampire Alshiera was also in the corner of the kitchen.

Huh? That's Kimaris and the boss' daughter, right? Ain't this the kitchen? The hell's going on?

Why were the Archdemon's wife, daughter and an Archdemon candidate all working in the kitchen? But before all that, a former Archangel, the sworn enemies of sorcerers, working as a butler was beyond strange. Shax was always working at the church, so he couldn't understand what was going on here.

“Oh, forgive me Kuroka. I lost track of the time.” Nephy noticed Kuroka and called out to her.

“Lady Nephy, we can manage here, please go ahead.” Raphael urged her on, and Nephy bobbed her head down to him as she left the kitchen. She then held out her right hand to Kuroka.

“Please, this way... Oh...” Just as she began to speak, she looked over to Shax with her azure eyes, as if she'd just remembered something, then said, “Ummm, Sir Shax. Could you guide Kuroka please?”

“Sure, that's what I came for.”

“Huh? Uh, um...” Kuroka's face turned quite red at his reply.

“Please take hold of her hand and escort her properly.”

And in that instant, Raphael once more pointed a bloodthirsty smile towards him.

Hey! Isn't it pretty bad to do that here?!

Holding hands didn't bother him much, but doing so in front of Raphael was dangerous. He just barely escaped being killed moments ago. It wasn't certain that Kuroka would be able to stop the butler this time around.

“Huh...?”

And yet when Nephy turned around with her head tilted to the side, the bloodthirst vanished entirely.

“Lady Nephy. Please take care of Kuroka.”

“Of course. Please leave her to me.”

Raphael was clearly grinding his teeth behind his gentle expression, but it seemed he wasn't going to make a move to draw his sword.

Huh? Does that mean this little princess is more powerful...?

She sealed Raphael's bloodthirst, regardless of whether it was

deliberate. She really was the bride of an Archdemon.

And with his hope for life restored, Shax became somewhat embarrassed to hold Kuroka's hand. She was also blushing profusely, so it left him quite perplexed as to what to do. However, while the two hesitated, Nephy took both of their hands and put them together.

"I may not know the full circumstances, but Kuroka requires your aid. Is this not something quite important for you as well?"

Shax's eyes shot open upon having that pointed out to him.

I've pretty much never talked to this little princess, right...? And nevertheless, she saw right through him. The reason Shax could face forward and continue living was because Kuroka was still alive. That's because she was the only survivor who managed to escape that hell five years ago.

If she was capable of smiling, then that would give meaning to Shax's mistake-filled and rubbish life. He wanted to support her so that she could lead an upright life. It took him a long time to realize his own feelings, and here Nephy saw through everything with a single glance.

Compared to Shax, who could almost boast of being inferior to none when it came to being incapable of reading others, her ability to do so was far beyond the realm of sorcery, and pretty much a miracle.

Shax froze up in shock as he heard whispering coming from the kitchen.

"Aah, so Kuroka really is like that with that old guy?"

"Selphy, even if it's clear to see, don't say that in front of Raphael."

"Such unnecessary consideration. That one's death has already been settled."

"Keeheehee, there's no need to be so angry. Is it not something to rejoice in? For these past few days, I've felt the sweet aroma of love power coming out of the church, luring me towards it."

"When did you get here Miss Gremory...? Wait. I thought I hadn't seen you in the afternoons lately, is that where you've been?"

Having perhaps sensed the danger to Shax if this was allowed to continue, Nephy yelled while turning red in the ears.

"That's enough of that, everyone! Please get back to work!"

And as expected, with Nephy yelling at them, everyone in the kitchen scattered and returned to work, leaving Shax completely dumbfounded.

"Uhh, hey, princess?"

"Nephy is fine."

"Okay, hey Nephy? Is it always like that over here?"

"Ummm, yes. More or less."

"Must be tough."

Shax strained a smile, and Nephy looked at him with a cold gaze, fully implying, "Aren't you the one who will have it tough from now on?" Not that he noticed. As for Kuroka, she was well beyond the point of being able to think anymore, and her eyes were trembling violently.

"Well, we won't be able to talk quietly here, so please follow me to my room."

It really did seem like this was a frequent occurrence. Despite being red in the face from shouting, Nephy showed no particular sign of being perturbed and walked ahead.

"Aah... Can you walk, Kurosuke?"

"Oh, yes..." Kuroka was clearly quite thrown off by all this and was rather unsteady on her feet.

"Here."

"...Th-Thanks."

Shax squeezed on her hand, and she timidly gripped it back.

That reaction just now... I hope she doesn't get any weird ideas...

After being told, "You love him, right?" by someone, humans were the type to get the impression that it was true. Because of the event from five years ago, Kuroka thought of Shax as her savior, and he did understand that much. He could also tell from their earlier exchange that she had some kind of yearning for him. And seeing that it came from such an incident, her yearning was something like the admiration for an older neighbor.

If she were to feel love for someone, there should have been a far more suitable person out there for her. Even if Raphael wasn't around, Shax wasn't so depraved that he would put his hands on a minor either.

But even so, her hand was so slender and soft that one wouldn't think it belonged to a master of the blade.

As a slight digression, Shax loved cats to the point that if he didn't become a sorcerer, he fully considered spending his whole life researching folklore on cats and just fooling around with them all day long.



"Please have a seat and relax."

"Thank you, I'll be in your care."

After arriving in the throne room, Nephy began examining Kuroka's eyes. That being said, she didn't move at all and was simply touching Kuroka's cheeks as she peered right into her pupils. Unlike sorcery, which was an accumulation of knowledge and precise techniques, mysticism manifested by praying to "something" like spirits and fairies which couldn't be seen.

And Nephy believed that “something” to be a flow of many powers similar to mana or life force running through the earth. Zagan thought it to be a manifestation of power meant for destroying something out there, but she wondered if those within the flow were more like beings with a will that one could converse with. So in short, Nephy was searching for a power she could borrow to be able to heal Kuroka’s eyes.

Mmm... Nephy having such a serious expression on her face is both unusual and cute! Zagan gazed over Nephy boldly without a hint of hesitation, causing Nephy to look over at him in discomfort.

“Um, Master Zagan, it’s embarrassing if you stare so much.”

“Huh? Oh! Sorry...”

He really was overdoing it. In fact, Nephy probably knew this was exactly what was going to happen, which is why she planned to use her room. Such was her plan, but it was inevitable that she had to pass through the throne room to reach it. And upon doing so, Zagan had called her to a halt.

I mean, even I haven’t been to Nephy’s room. Kuroka would be borderline acceptable, but she’d petitioned to have Shax accompany her. This was beyond permissible, so he ended up lending them the throne room instead. Incidentally, both Kuroka and Shax seemed to have sensed this and simply nodded when he told them to stay.

Zagan began looking around restlessly as he gauged how things were going since just staring at Nephy was causing her trouble. He did have a table prepared for them, so Nephy and Kuroka were sitting across from each other. As for Shax, he was sitting next to Kuroka holding her hand.

Ugh...! Damn him! They only met recently and are already naturally holding hands?! Just how much time did it take Zagan to reach that stage? He did hold Nephy’s hand sometimes without intending to do so, but it took an entire month for him to be able to do so by his own will. He truly couldn’t make light of this man despite him being Zagan’s subordinate.

Oh, but Shax will probably get killed if I don’t give Raphael a warning... He was a rather troublesome subordinate, but Zagan couldn’t bring himself to actually hate him. Besides, Zagan also wished for Kuroka’s happiness.

He continued to look over them from his throne for a while longer when he noticed that Nephy’s expression suddenly stiffened up.

Is the condition of her eyes that bad...? Zagan had heard that the issue was well beyond Shax’s capabilities and couldn’t be healed through sorcery. That’s why they tried to rely on Nephy’s mysticism, but it looked like it was possibly out of her reach as well.

The others also noticed the subtleties in Nephy’s expression, and

Shax questioned her in a hesitant tone.

“Does it seem too hard for you, too?”

“Oh, no, I do believe it’s possible to heal them. But...”

Nephy stopped there as if she didn’t want to say it in front of Kuroka. However, Shax understood her and nodded anyway.

“I see. So there’s still a risk even if we use mysticism. Something like that?”

“...Yes.”

“It’s all right. Please tell me, Lady Nephy. I came here having properly resolved myself.”

That’s why Shax was with her. Nephy looked up to Zagan with a troubled gaze.

Ah... Having her rely on me like this kind of makes me a little happy...

It was possibly impudent of him, but being relied on when she was stumped didn’t feel bad at all. So Zagan stood from his throne and walked over to Nephy.

“Tell her, Nephy. Kuroka and Shax are strong. They can accept the truth.”

Nephy grasped Zagan’s hand as he urged her on and then took a deep breath before speaking.

“It’s possible to heal your eyes. However, this wound is very deep. There is a risk that there will be side effects from being healed.”

Kuroka’s body stiffened up ever so slightly, but she immediately nodded.

“What sort of side effects specifically?”

“I can’t tell that much...” Nephy replied and shook her head.

“If there’s a side effect, it’ll probably be to your memory,” Shax said in her stead.

“My memory...” Kuroka put her hand to her chest.

“Yeah. Even now, the structure of the brain hasn’t been fully clarified by sorcery. But we do know that the optic nerves in the brain are adjacent to where memories are stored. That’s why it’s possible to reproduce visions of memories... But I guess all that’s not really relevant right now.”

Shax’s explanation was outside of Zagan’s field of expertise, but he understood he was implying that there were other ways to approach the problem.

Even if it was temporary, he did manage to restore Kuroka’s vision. If that sorcery was to be completed, it would be possible for Kuroka to see even if her eyes weren’t healed. Kuroka likely also understood this, and she was the only one who could decide what to do. All gazes converged on her as she gulped.

And unable to watch that go on, Shax scratched his cheek and mumbled as if speaking to himself.

“Ah... It doesn't really need to be decided on right away...”

“No. I've decided to have my eyes healed,” Kuroka replied with resolve.

Shax plopped his hand atop her head as if praising her determination.

“Okay. Even if something happens, I'll manage it one way or another. So just relax and get healed.”

“...Yes!”

Even Zagan felt relief seeing the two of them like that.

Looks like Kuroka really is all right now. Kuroka had once belonged to an assassination squad of the church meant for hunting sorcerers. As such, even though they gave her a place in the world, she never relied on Zagan or Chastille. And now she was able to rely on somebody so clearly.

Be it her unfortunate disposition, her turbulent past, or her blindness, this girl was just a bundle of anxiety for others. And he could finally feel some relief about her. The two of them could surely overcome whatever Kuroka was unable to manage by her own strength. That's precisely what Nephy was to Zagan, so he felt this was true for them as well.

Is the problem here actually Nephy? She fundamentally tried to keep her distance from mysticism, and Kuroka's wound was deeper than imagined. Zagan could tell that this chipped away at her confidence.

Nevertheless, Nephy was a strong girl. She took a small breath then replied in a clear tone.

“Please give me a little more time. I'll find a more definitive way to heal your eyes.”

“Understood. I'll be in your care.”

Kuroka bowed down and answered Nephy without showing a single hint of fear.



Shax led Kuroka by the hand and the two of them left the throne room. After seeing them off, Zagan turned over to Nephy.

“Are you okay, Nephy?”

“Yes. I'll definitely show that I can heal her.”

“That's not what I'm talking about...”

I'm more worried about Nephy feeling uneasy about this. And as he worried about how to get that across to her, Nephy smiled ever so slightly.

“It's all right. I properly understand your concern for me, Master Zagan.”

“I-Is that so...?”

“Yes. But I don't want to give in.”

“...Got it. Then I won’t say anything.”

Nephy rarely showed such self-assertion, so Zagan didn’t want to say anything to stop her. After a short while, Nephy calmed herself down and bobbed her head with a bow.

“Then I shall return to work. I cannot just leave the kitchen and laundry to everyone else.”

“Mmm...”

Zagan watched Nephy leave the throne room with quick strides, then narrowed his eyes.

Although, it’s not like I can just stand by and do nothing... The distress of trying to heal someone was the same as their life being in your hands, which meant Nephy was under enormous pressure at the moment. That was why, in his mind, choosing to do nothing was out of the question. And so, after thinking it over for a bit, Zagan walked over to the garden.

She should be around here... When he left his castle and exited out to the garden, Zagan found his subordinates running about busily. This was because they were ordered by him to continue their usual business while also gathering information on Shere Khan. After passing through the busy sorcerers, he found a suspicious-looking granny all on her own, breathing raggedly while hiding in a thicket.

“Keeheehee, what bittersweet love power! Let’s see how long that wily Shax can hold on desperately pretending not to notice Lady Kuroka’s bravery! He possesses an innocence different from my liege’s that none can stop.”

Her gaze was fixed on the backs of Kuroka and Shax as they returned to the church hand in hand. Judging by how Shax was somewhat pale, he was likely hoping to quickly get back before provoking Raphael’s wrath.

And so Zagan called out to the old peeping Tom.

“Gremory, sorry for bothering you while you’re busy, but I’ve got work for you.”

“Oh, wait just a moment longer! Lady Kuroka just stumbled and is clinging to his arm!”

“What?! Hmm, supporting her by the waist I see... Not bad...” Zagan muttered.

“Keeheehee, it seems Lady Kuroka is unable to bear it. The way she’s completely shaken and resisting by bopping him with her fists doesn’t seem to have an ounce of strength behind it!”

“It’s no different from simple frolicking like that. Though I suppose that’s exactly what it is.”

“Oh my! Now that she finally fell to her knees, that damned Shax is carrying her in his arms!” Gremory exclaimed.

“...That idiot. He’ll get killed by Raphael if he’s seen like that.”

“Worry not, my liege. It shall be over soon.”

After Zagan, against his better judgment, joined the granny in the thicket, a butler ran past them at full force with the gentle expression of an affectionate father.



“Ah... Wait. I understand your feelings, but wait. I’m begging you here, don’t kill him.”

Zagan grabbed the back of Raphael’s neck as he passed by, and sensing the bloodthirst in the area, Shax began running away as fast as he could.

“My liege! Please grant me your benevolence! I must cut that bastard down!”

So even Raphael ends up like this... Zagan also had a daughter in Foll. He couldn’t think of this as somebody else’s problem entirely. And setting aside his butler, who was still kicking about violently, Zagan turned to Gremory.

“So, are you done now, Gremory?”

“Keehee, so what do you desire, my liege?”

Gremory’s fingers wiggled about as if expecting a new toy to come within her grasp, and Zagan cut forth to his business emotionlessly.

“I’m going to see Orias. Guide me to—”

“—Eek! I don’t want to die yet!”

Gremory began putting her sorcery to use to escape before Zagan could even finish speaking.

Well, I guess this is pretty much what I expected... About a month had passed since then, but Gremory escaped from her teacher Orias despite angering her quite thoroughly. It was pretty easy to imagine what kind of scolding she was in for were they to reunite. That’s why her reaction just now could be said to be fairly natural.

As such, Zagan could predict her reaction. He immediately stretched his free hand out to grasp Gremory by the neck.

“Mrrr! So you really won’t let me out of this?!” Raphael said as he squirmed about.

“Ah, you idiot, if you do that—”

Zagan’s posture crumbled because Raphael was still kicking about. Even with that, he should have been able to grasp Gremory were she to move as he expected her to.

“I’m going to live! I still must love strike so many maidens!”

Gremory’s evasive skills when she mustered all her strength in desperation exceeded Zagan’s expectations. His hand missed her, and the granny escaped into the forest with agile movements that one wouldn’t expect for such an old woman.

“She got away from me...? Damn her... She’s gotten even better at fleeing.”

Setting aside her personality, Gremory was quite talented, so she was given plenty of “recompense” by Zagan. And now, he was suspicious of whether she used everything he gave her to fortify her ability to run away.

"Kimaris, are you there?" Zagan asked with a sigh.

"Did you call for me, Sir Zagan?"

A giant sorcerer appeared only a few seconds after Zagan called for him.

"Gremory ran away. Could you catch her for me?"

"I wonder... It's possible to pursue her, but Miss Gremory has lately improved her ability to erase her presence again, so I do think it will take some time."

"So even you'd have a hard time...?" Zagan asked, completely taken aback. However, he then shook his head and said, "Whatever. I do know where Orias is, so I'll probably be fine on my own."

"What shall we do about Miss Gremory?"

"Please go and catch her for now so that she can be punished. She's been teasing Kuroka and Shax too much lately."

"Leave it to me."

Zagan watched his reliable right-hand-man take chase after Gremory immediately, then looked over to his now awkwardly silent butler.

"Keep it in moderation."

"You won't condemn me?"

The fact that Gremory had gotten away was half this butler's fault. Raphael was making an unusually surprised expression, and Zagan replied to him in a serious tone.

"I don't believe a man who forces a subordinate to do something he is incapable of doing himself can call himself a king."

In the off-chance that Foll found a lover, Zagan's reaction would likely exceed Raphael's. Actually, if she wasn't able to find one, that would be an entirely different source of concern, but that known as human emotion couldn't be explained by such simple logic.

"If that time were to come, I would surely act the same."

"I see. Then we'll need whoever she picks to become quite strong..." Raphael folded his arms and groaned.

It was difficult to imagine someone capable of withstanding the wrath of an Archdemon and a former Archangel, but Zagan couldn't leave his daughter to any less of a man. Unfortunately, nobody was present to fault the two men for their lack of maturity.

"Now then, I'll be absent for a while."

Zagan didn't inform him of the full details, but Raphael had surely heard the name Orias before. The butler turned a sharp gaze to his king.

"Hmm. Orias is the name of an Archdemon, right?"

"Yeah. Her power has become a necessity. I'm going to see her."

She's the one who will be of most help to Nephy... That Archdemon was likely the only person in the world who was more well versed in

mysticism and celestial mysticism than Nephteros. Moreover, Orias was Nephy's mother.

I've put it off for a while, but the day has come to introduce Nephy to Orias. Nephy might be shaken by such a meeting, but nevertheless, he wanted the two of them to meet. Zagan himself didn't have anybody he could call his parents, so he couldn't really picture it. However, he believed that a parent was one who would unconditionally protect and support their child. Those were the feelings he had for Foll, at least.

That's why Orias would surely support Nephy. He had indirectly mentioned these things to Raphael before, but he fundamentally didn't talk about it. Such was the case, but the loyal butler replied with a worried expression.

"Could you allow me to accompany you?"

Zagan found this request rather unexpected, so he simply stared back at the butler in wonder for a short while.

"Hmm? And why's that?"

Raphael held out his armored left arm.

"There is another stage of the Sacred Sword. That Archdemon may be able to give me the hint for reaching it."

The Confession that Archdemon Andrealphus... no, that Michael used. It was said to be the final form of the Sacred Sword, accomplished by unleashing the Seraph that was sealed within.

There was once a battle where the preceding Archdemon Marchosias, Wise Dragon Orobas, and several Archangels all lost their lives. It was likely a battle against demons, or perhaps the Demon Lord. Raphael was one of the few survivors of that battle. This man went as far as supping on the blood of the Wise Dragon and starting the Unification Faction in the church to cooperate with sorcerers so that victory could be grasped the next time those enemies were to show up. His battle was far from over.

Zagan came to know of Azazel and the names of all Sacred Swords from the journal he found in Nephy's hometown. There was a fairly high probability that Orias knew something as someone who came from the same hidden village.

Zagan hesitated for a moment. There wasn't any inconvenience in having Orias meet Raphael.

But the castle's defenses will weaken. The ones he granted Heaven's Phosphor to, Gremory and Kimaris, were currently indisposed. He couldn't count on his guest Alshiera. Meaning the only ones left at the castle to protect his subordinates were Nephy and Foll.

It was the height of folly to weaken his defense while an Archdemon, even a crippled one, was taking an aggressive stance against him. And yet, Zagan nodded.

“...Very well. Come with me. I don’t know if you will find the answers you seek, but I’ll allow your company.”

As she is now, she won’t fall behind even an Archdemon. This was Zagan’s domain. The barriers around the area worked to protect his subordinates and family. Even if the carpet was pulled out from under his feet, they would surely be able to hold out until he returned.

“You have my thanks.”

And so the two awkward men left the castle behind.



“Yay! And that’s, like, all the morning’s work done! Time for a break!”

Selphy threw up her arms in joy in the castle’s kitchen. All the post-breakfast cleaning and preparations for lunch were now complete, so the three girls could relax.

There were usually more people in the kitchen at this time, but Nephy and Raphael apparently had business to attend to and took their leave in the middle of work. Lilith was also absent because she wasn’t feeling well. Fortunately, Alshiera had been added to the kitchen crew, so they had enough people on hand to deal with the work regardless. Foll admired how Selphy was capable of fully expressing her emotions like this when they were doing the same thing every day.

Maybe that’s why Zagan hired Selphy at the castle... neither Nephy nor Foll were particularly good at expressing their emotions. Having someone like Selphy around who reacted to everything so purely on reflex was like a form of stimulus to them. In truth, Foll used Selphy as a basis sometimes when she wanted to express her feelings to Zagan... Though it would be rather embarrassing to mimic her exactly.

And as Foll continued to observe Selphy, the other girl left in the kitchen giggled lightly.

“Teehee, I see the young dragon has learned to observe the world.”

“Huh? What are you talking about?”

“I’m speaking of Shax and Kuroka.”

“Oh,” Foll replied with a nod, then said, “Anyone who has watched Zagan and Nephy would gain that skill.”

“Those two are totally awkward, after all,” Selphy added.

“Mm. But they’re still way more honest than before. When I first came here, it was much worse.”

“...That Silver-Eyed King... What is he doing?”

“But ya know, seeing my childhood friend being all awkward like that is kinda irritating, huh?”

Having a girl who was pretty much the definition of

thoughtlessness say such a thing meant it was quite serious, and Alshiera nodded gravely.

"There's no other choice. That child clearly never had any leisure to infatuate herself with love, seeing the life she had. It seems she's trying to pull along that dense man, but he has no idea what to do when pulled along like that..." Alshiera said, then clapped her hands upon realizing something and continued, "Oh my, this is quite amusing."

"You're speaking like Gremory," Foll muttered with a sigh.

Selphy then raised her hand vigorously.

"Oh yeah! Miss Alshiera! Are you okay with tea? I'm gonna brew some."

"Wine will do for me."

"Uhhh, maybe you should cut that out? Mister Raphael was kinda angry this morning, right? You'll be in for a good scolding when he comes back ya know?"

"Oh well. Then I'll content myself with some tea."

"Eheheh, even Mister Raphael praised my tea before, so look forward to it! Now what to have for a snack..."

Selphy happily placed a kettle on the stove then began searching for snacks. And before she knew it, Foll found herself alone with Alshiera.

"Oh yeah, I haven't shown my thanks yet," Foll mumbled to herself, and Alshiera cocked her head curiously.

"Thanks? Did I do something to earn your gratitude?"

Alshiera looked up to the ceiling as if searching for an answer. It really did appear that she wasn't playing dumb and actually didn't remember. Foll put both her hands on her lap and straightened her posture, then bobbed her head down.

"You were the one who saved me back then. Thank you."

And having recalled what Foll was talking about, Alshiera narrowed her eyes reproachfully and put her finger to her lips.

"So you remember. But that's something you mustn't speak of. Please forget about it if you can. That is something which must not exist."

Just what feelings lay behind her warning? Foll silently thought over the meaning of those words then returned a slight nod.

"Got it. Then I won't talk about it."

"What a clever girl."

"Then let me ask something else."

Alshiera smiled in a troubled manner.

"Oh my, there's much I am unable to answer, you know?"

"I just want to ask. It's fine if you don't answer. Alshiera, why don't you call Zagan by his name?"

It was supposed to be a perfectly natural question. Alshiera only ever referred to Zagan as the Silver-Eyed King. This was also on Selphy and Lilith's minds, but they looked like they just decided it couldn't be helped.

However, Foll's question wasn't out of simple curiosity. It came from a certain conviction of hers.

Alshiera's eyes shot open widely.

"...I expected no less of the Silver-Eyed King's beloved daughter. You've identified the exact question that I don't want to be asked," Alshiera whispered quietly, then she listlessly smiled as she brushed Foll's head.

Her hand wasn't all that much larger than Foll's. Plus as a vampire, it had no body warmth and was cold to the touch.

But somehow... it's warm. It was the same feeling she had when Zagan or Nephy brushed her head. And after Foll contented herself to that sensation for a while longer, Alshiera eventually answered her in a resigned tone.

"The answer to your question is... I don't have the qualifications to speak the Silver-Eyed King's name."

Foll didn't think she would actually answer, so she stared back at the vampire.

"Is that important?"

"Indeed. It is for me."

"Zagan probably doesn't think so," Foll remarked, but Alshiera shook her head.

"Even if the Silver-Eyed King permits it, I never will."

Her reply was startlingly obstinate, and Foll let out an involuntary sigh.

"...So awkward."

"That may be so."

Alshiera was fully aware of that fact, so she giggled, displaying the same cheeky attitude as always.

Around this time, Selphy returned with three people's share of cookies and tea atop a tray.

"I found some snacks! They're the cookies Miss Nephy made yesterday."

"Won't Raphael get angry if we eat them?"

"It's A-OK! We can just apologize if he gets angry!"

Watching Selphy laugh it off without giving it any thought, Foll's lips slackened.

"You'll also have to say 'sorry' too, Alshiera."

Alshiera looked at the young dragon in surprise. And having expected this reaction in some way, Selphy strained a smile.

"Did you do something to anger Mister Raphael? It's okay! He's

got a scary face, but if you're honest, he'll totally forgive you! Actually, if you don't say anything, he'll get even angrier, so you've gotta hurry!"

Alshiera smiled in a troubled manner at the endlessly optimistic girl.

"That boy would surely forgive me, but I am not so generous as to forgive myself after a simple apology," she replied in a self-deprecating tone.

Foll remained silent and started munching on the cookies Selphy had brought over. Nephy's baking didn't disappoint. The moderate sweetness and fragrant aroma of spices were exquisite.

"So you need to properly apologize to Alshiera yourself, Alshiera."

The vampire looked ready to spill her tea upon hearing such a nonsensical comment. Foll then took a sip of tea herself before rising from her seat.

"Don't worry, I'll protect you until Alshiera forgives you."

It seemed that was Foll's way of repaying her debt.



"Hmhmm, it's just like you to worry about this kinda stuff, Nephy."

Nephy's avian friend Manuela snickered as she put together some casual clothes for her. This clothing shop clerk had a habit of dressing Nephy up every time she came to talk to her, so she was quite used to it already and just let it happen. Though, she did so with a bitter smile.

"You've really been a big help," Nephy said as she nodded her head, then claimed, "I was worried I was going off track."

"It's fine. Coordinating outfits is my expertise."

Manuela was currently fitting a pure white silk dress on Nephy.

"Hmm, you've got white hair and skin, so I think we need something else to make them pop... We really should go with more exposu—"

"Wouldn't an overcoat be more appropriate for the season?"

It was standard fare for Manuela to make her wear strange clothing all the time, so Nephy forestalled her efforts.

"Awww, come on. You're finally looking to enhance your charm. Shouldn't you try challenging yourself a bit more?"

Would Master Zagan be happy with that...? Nephy froze up at the thought that he would end up disillusioned, thinking that she was shameless. It was too embarrassing to do it anyway. So Nephy shook her head.

"I'll refrain. It's too embarrassing."

"Hmmm?" Manuela smiled suspiciously and brought her face to

Nephy's ear as she whispered to her. "But didn't he like that swimsuit you wore? And you did too, right?"

"Ah...!" Nephy gasped. She almost wanted to praise herself for not bursting out and asking how she knew that.

Well, Master Zagan was rather pleased. And that made me happy! It was entirely possible that she didn't find it bad herself... or rather, that she liked it. However, she didn't expect someone else to be able to so accurately pinpoint her feelings over this when she wasn't so sure about it herself. Nephy writhed over this fact, and Manuela began cackling.

"Ahahahah! Well, I guess it's a little early for you, seeing that you still turn red just from holding hands."

"How do you know that?"

"Hmmm, I wonder..."

Every citizen of Kianoides knew at least that much, since the two of them were in that state every single time they came to town. However, Manuela watched over them with far more joy... or rather, kindness. She went to get another set of clothes to pull things back together. This time, it was an outfit suitable for a noble composed of a shirt, trousers, and a black mantle with a chain clasp.

"By the way, how about this set for Zagan to match yours?"

"I think it's wonderful!"

Nephy liked Zagan's usual attire, but she also wanted to see him wearing something else once in a while.

Looking over her with an entranced look on her face, Manuela sighed in a regretful tone.

"Oh yeah, I've been wanting to play around with... I mean, have Chastille try a bunch of clothes, but she just won't come by the shop."

Isn't that because she knows what you're planning...? Nephy kept it to herself with a strained smile, and Manuela gazed out the window towards the church.

"That girl's on a business trip to the Holy City, right?"

"Yes. I believe Nephteros is with her."

"Little Kuroka is also away, so only the three idiots are left at the church, huh?"

"Those gentlemen aren't so bad once you get to know them, you know?"

Nephy felt they were afraid of her, but she didn't quite know why. Sure, they had first met amidst a battle, but she didn't think they would drag out a grudge. Especially not when they were the ones who had acted all haughty around Zagan, which had forced her hand.

Now that I think about it, I believe Master Zagan asked Lord Barbatos to do something for him... It didn't appear to have anything to do with his relationship with Chastille, so perhaps there was something in the

Holy City that required further investigation? Nephys expression clouded over as she pondered the matter, and having sensed that, Manuela changed the topic.

“Anyway, wouldn’t it be better if you were a little more assertive?”

“I don’t know how to do that even if you tell me that...”

Nephys wanted to make Zagan happy. She wanted to attract him more. She had plenty of desire. However, she didn’t have a clue as to how that could be accomplished.

“Well, I guess you’ve got a point...” Manuela nodded as if to say that was actually a good thing. “Let’s see... How about trying to suddenly crawl into his bed...? Ah, I guess that’s going a little fast for you two, though.”

Manuela just said what came to mind, but she shook her head, and Nephys replied with a bitter smile.

“Master Zagan normally sleeps while sitting on his throne anyway.”

“...Oh, so that’s also a bit of a problem, huh?” Manuela said as scratched her head. Then she smiled suspiciously, looking just like Gremory as she continued, “Well, why not try it out if you ever spot Zagan sleeping in a bed?”

Crawling in bed with Zagan... The mere thought of that set Nephys heart ablaze, making her hot in the face as well. However, at the same time, she seemed rather confused by the idea.

“But what do I do after crawling in?”

“Pffft! Ahahahahaha! Now that’s my Nephys! It’s fine, just sleep there next to him. Zagan will probably do as he likes after that... I’m sure the two of you will enjoy it.”

“I see,” Nephys replied with a nod.

Master Zagan was quite pleased when I let him sleep on my lap that one time. Sleeping atop a bed may have an entirely different atmosphere to it. I’m a little interested... It was possible that he would find this shameless, but Nephys felt like it would be nice to embrace him while in a bed.

“Understood. I’ll try my best.”

“Hnnngh! I must inform Comrade Gremory!”

Nephys didn’t notice that Manuela was grinning with a mischievous look right next to her while she was gathering her resolve.

After leaving the shop, Nephys realized that she had spent a fair amount of time there.

I have to figure out how to heal Kuroka... What am I doing...? Well, Nephys was feeling quite gloomy, so maybe she wanted Manuela to comfort her. Still, she had to focus. And just as she slapped her cheeks

to pull herself together...

“Nephy?”

“Huh? Oh, Master Zagan.”

Zagan just happened to pass by in the street in front of her. Taking a closer look, he was accompanied by Raphael, who was wearing Valefor’s armor. Raphael usually didn’t come to town, so it was quite an unusual combination. Though it was surprising, Zagan did spend a lot of time in town searching for his old friend and dealing with the clash with another Archdemon. It seemed that Raphael’s strength was necessary to him this time.

Nephy ran over to him, and Zagan’s expression loosened up considerably.

“Are you on your way back already, Nephy?”

“Yes. It’s about time to start preparations for dinner,” Nephy replied. She didn’t realize what time it was until just now, so she answered in a somewhat flustered tone. Then, she continued, “Are you also on your way back, Master Zagan?”

“Yeah. I’d ask to go together... but I’ll be leaving the castle for a bit.”

Nephy’s ears trembled as she blinked.

“Do you have some business to attend to?”

“Mm. I have to look for someone, you see...”

Is this about his old friend? It seemed Zagan was at his limits regarding his investigation of Marc. It only stood to reason that he would want to search for clues farther away from the castle.

“Understood. I’ll be lonely... I mean, I shall await your return.”

It was impossible for her to even consider getting in Zagan’s way at such times. Nephy immediately put on a smile, and Zagan began scratching his head in a troubled manner.

“No, I mean, I planned to have you come along too... But, well, Gremory or the like will probably tag along as well.”

“Huh? Really?!”

Nephy spontaneously clapped her hands together. Her voice was just a little more excited than usual. And naturally enough, Zagan was left staring back at her. Nephy herself realized that her reaction just now was a failure on her part.

Oh, Master Zagan has definitely figured out that I’ve wanted him to bring me along with him all this time. She could tell just by looking at his face. It was saying, “Oh, I see. Nephy wants to tag along, it seems. Hm, that would be a problem if things get dangerous. Still, anyone incapable of fulfilling such a simple request cannot call themselves an Archdemon.”

“U-Um, that’s not what I...”

“No, it’s fine. I understand. It’s alright!”

Nephy was troubled precisely because he understood. She endured wanting to cover her face in embarrassment and then took a look around her in a fidgety manner.

“What’s wrong?”

“Oh, not much. It’s just that Miss Gremory would usually be watching us from the shadows with a shady gaze... but she doesn’t seem to be around today?”

Nephy cocked her head, and Zagan let out a tired sigh.

“That idiot ran away the moment I mentioned Orias’ name. Kimaris is currently taking chase. I’m sure she just doesn’t have the leisure to mess with us.”

“Oh, lately she’s been rather crazy about Kuroka and Shax, after all.”

“I do want to tell her to restrain herself a little.”

Both Zagan and Nephy let out a dry laugh and cocked their heads.

Huh? Does that mean Miss Gremory isn’t watching us? Even if Raphael was with them, didn’t that mean the two of them were all alone without anyone to get in their way?

And the first to take action upon realizing that was Zagan. He firmly gripped both of Nephy’s hands.

“Nephy! Let’s go on a trip to the Holy City Raziel right now!”

“Yes!”

She replied immediately but stiffened up a moment later.

The Holy City? Isn’t that where Chastille and Nephtheros went? She’d heard the name of the city before, but had no idea where it actually was.

“Um, the Holy City? Right now?”

“Yeah! I’ll let Foll know right away. We’ve got some additional hands in the kitchen, so it’ll be alright.”

“U-Um, nobody will get angry?” Nephy asked in a bewildered voice.

“And who are you saying will get angry if I’m the one to say it’s fine?”

She had no other choice but to nod along. All of Zagan’s followers gathered around him because they idolized him. If he told them he was going on a vacation, they would surely see him off happily.

Zagan continued to grip Nephy’s hand and looked like a sad puppy. “Well, if you don’t want to...”

Nephy found this rather unfair but held Zagan’s hand up to her face anyway.

“Of course I want to go.”

And so Zagan and Nephy’s trip to the Holy City was set to go.

Chapter II: It was a Thousand Years Too Early to Act as a Married Couple, Even After Going Three Thousand Miles to Visit My Mother-In-Law

“Mm. Got it. We’re fine here. You two have fun,” Foll said to Zagan after getting a telepathic communication from him while she was in the forest a short distance away from the castle.

He couldn’t even use telepathy before, meaning he learned something new again. It was pretty much expected of Zagan at this point. Foll thought that she had gotten stronger, but Zagan had taken yet another step further away. His back was so far in the distance. But that’s precisely what made him a father worthy of her yearning and admiration.

“Sorry. I want to bring you along too, but...”

“It’s fine. I know you’re thinking of me, so you should just take your time and enjoy yourself.”

It was the first time that Zagan said he wanted to go on a trip all alone with Nephly, though it seemed Raphael was with them. Just what kind of daughter would she be if she didn’t allow that? That’s why Foll wanted to send them off with her blessings.

She was pretty sure it went well. Zagan cut off his telepathic communication soon afterward. He did leave behind several requests for her that had to be taken care of. There were three days until they returned to the castle. Foll had to manage the kitchen now that Nephly and Raphael were gone, tell Kuroka that her treatment would have to wait until they were back, and continue gathering information on Marc.

“But first... there’s this,” Foll said as she turned her attention toward an androgynous sorcerer.

“Hehehe... You didn’t ask Zagan for help? How brave of you...” Archdemon Bifrons was, for some reason, standing right before her.

I thought I felt a weird gaze this morning. That’s why she had thought to take a look around the castle, but she ended up finding an unexpected intruder. The first time she’d met this Archdemon, she’d fallen back on her butt in an unsightly manner. If not for Zagan, she probably wouldn’t have returned from that ship alive.

Such a terrifying Archdemon had managed to slip past Zagan's sight and was now standing before her. It was an utterly hopeless situation. And yet, Foll replied in an unperturbed voice.

"Go away, Bifrons. I don't want to fight right now."

Zagan and Nephy weren't coming back. Raphael was out. Gremory and Kimaris were also still away. The only one here was Foll. No help would come. And the young Archdemon replied to her with a pleased smile.

"Mm. What a truly brave little girl. You're so cute that even I feel like I want to protect you. If only my little doll was as cute as you." Bifrons nodded with an air of admiration then pointed a smile at Foll without even a hint of malice to it. "So it's not out of the question for me to comply with such a request, but... that obviously depends on your attitude."

The Archdemon's smile was entirely innocent, but their words were coated with dark malice. Foll was at least prepared for this much.

"What do you want?"

"Nothing much, it's not all that complicated. I just want to borrow your powers a bit. Or more specifically, your eyes, I suppose."

"My eyes...?"

"Yup. I'd like to swap my eyes with yours. With that, I'll be able to see what you've seen, and you'll be able to see what I've seen. How about it? Doesn't it sound fun?"

A contract with the devil. Foll could tell what was going on immediately. But it was a proposal worth considering nonetheless.

Will it help Zagan if I find out what Bifrons has seen? It probably would, but Zagan wouldn't be happy about it. Besides, there was too large a possibility that the information would just go over her head.

More importantly, there's no guarantee Bifrons will settle with just my eyes. Foll knew that this sorcerer had once hijacked a pitiful vulpin girl named Kuu. Foll wasn't so foolish that she didn't think of the possibility of meeting an even worse fate as the price for having her eyes stolen. Even considering the advantage of being able to drive Bifrons away without a fight, the downsides were just far too large.

Foll shook her head while remaining as cautious as possible.

"I can't do that. It'll bother Zagan."

"Oh? I didn't think my conditions were all that bad though. So what can you offer me instead?"

Foll simply bobbed her head down.

"Please go away."

In her own little way, this was her being perfectly sincere. This was something she'd been incapable of in the past, even if the one she was speaking to was an Archdemon.

This is a cheap price to pay if I can protect Zagan and Alshiera.

But Bifrons simply burst into laughter in the face of such sincerity.

“Pffft. *Please?* Ahahahaha! This is the first time I’ve been told something so amusing in such a serious way! Even Nephtheros has a better sense for jokes! Ahaha!”

Bifrons was clearly laughing in contempt, but Foll still didn’t raise her head.

“...So will you leave?”

“Ahahahaaaah... Hmm, I had quite a good laugh, so I kind of want to listen to you. But I didn’t come here to play.” The Archdemon was laughing in tears but still spoke with malice. “Oh well, as thanks for making me laugh, I’ll make sure it doesn’t hurt. There’s nothing to be scared of. Just close your eyes and it’ll all be over quickly.”

Foll drooped her shoulders dejectedly.

“...I see. So it’s no good...”

“Now, now, no need to feel so down. I’m actually quite pleased with you, you know?”

Thus, Foll finally raised her head with a sigh.

“Then I’ll drive you away.”

Her amber eyes were filled with determination. Her reaction was pretty much as expected, but Bifrons still smiled as if unable to bear their happeness.

“Now that’s what makes you the Wise Dragon’s daughter! Allow me to teach you a little about sorcery as a reward!” the Archdemon mercilessly declared, but the first to take action was Foll.

“Black Dragon Marbas.”

She held out her hand and called to the black dragon. In the next instant, black claws took shape and tore apart the body of the childish Archdemon. Foll felt strange feedback from the strike. She certainly did tear Bifrons apart, but it was accompanied by a heavy feeling as if wading through water. There was no sense that she tore into a living being.

“Hehehe, is this your new power? It both destroys its target and eats their mana. Is this meant to mimic Zagan’s Heaven’s Phosphor? It’s not bad at all. What’s best about it is that it’s far faster than sorcery.”

Foll ground her teeth from having everything about her strike figured out after only being seen once.

Archdemons really are scary. This power could even defeat Decarabia, who had managed to strike down a homunculus of Andrealphus. But even so, it couldn’t reach a real Archdemon. After being torn apart, debris in the air gathered together and reconstructed Bifrons’ body.

What crazy regeneration abilities... Zagan once granted Nephtheros

the ability to kill an Archdemon, and Bifrons managed to bear the brunt of it multiple times and still regenerate. But above all else, wounds inflicted by Marbas were cursed. It was supposed to be impossible to regenerate them with sorcery, but it was like there was no effect at all.

Foll continued to observe Bifrons with her amber eyes.

No, this isn't a living being! It was "something" like debris. Or more specifically, it was like a crystallization of mana. Each crystal was literally the size of a grain of sand and had a terrifyingly intricate magic circle engraved on it.

Bifrons' body was a colony made of such crystals. Just how much skill and mana was required to manipulate such a thing? It was impossible for Foll as she was now. This also explained why Zagan's barrier was unable to perceive an intruder.

"Hehehe, looks like you can see it. Well, that was a freebie just for you. Keep it a secret from other sorcerers, okay?"

As implied, the Archdemon had deliberately acted in a way that Foll could witness. If Bifrons was so inclined, they could have eaten away at Foll's body from the inside out. The fact that they showed her this meant they were displaying the truth of what was about to happen to her own body before actually doing anything.

But even so, Foll didn't yield to fear.

"Heaven's Scale Snowfield."

She quietly muttered and a countless number of lights rose into the air. The small lights, which resembled powdered snow, were fragments of Heaven's Scale, the greatest shield that Zagan had developed.

"Heaven's Scale...? You know that's not enough to stop me, right?"

Just as Bifrons said, Zagan had granted Foll those scales as a way to protect her body. But it was impossible to protect herself from Bifrons' sorcery if it didn't serve as a means of attack. Foll was fully aware of this even as she wove together the spell.

That was because she needed to do it to beat Bifrons. Even this Archdemon was surely unaware of what it was that Foll was doing. She defenselessly exposed herself before a terrifying enemy and spread her arms out while closing her eyes. It looked like she had lost all heart. She then took a small breath and began singing.

"Huh?"

Bifrons sounded completely dumbfounded. Immediately following that, the world burst apart without a sound. With Bifrons at its center, the earth, the trees, the air, absolutely everything in a large radius was pulverized to atoms. Even Bifrons crumbled into nothing with a shocked expression plastered on their face.

Foll fell to her knees, unable to even witness this for herself.

“Haah... Haah...”

She was breathing roughly and could feel something hot crawling up her throat. The taste of rusted iron spread throughout her mouth. This wasn’t gastric acid but blood.

I couldn’t suppress the backlash. Even though she had managed to pulverize Bifrons’ body, she’d ended up inflicting a severe blow to herself. It was far too incomplete to use in an actual battle. But she’d had no other way of facing off against an Archdemon.

“How surprising... I didn’t think... you had such power.”

“Bi...frons...”

Perhaps just as one would expect of an Archdemon, she could still hear Bifrons’ voice even though the colony was completely destroyed.

“I see... That was a dragon’s roar. You formed a resonance between your own breath and Black Dragon Marbas’ breath, then had them reverberate within the snowfield to amplify its effect, right?” Bifrons saw through the entire attack in but a single glance. “Hehehe, how splendid. I sincerely apologize for underestimating you, daughter of Zagan. Or perhaps I should say... Apparition Valefor.”

Foll’s eyes shot open. This was a sign of respect from an Archdemon. And Bifrons continued speaking in a distorted voice.

“Aren’t you able to clad your body in that same power? I’d still be able to defend against it though.”

Foll glared back at the space where Bifrons was, and unexpectedly, the Archdemon continued speaking without a single hint of malice in their voice.

“Don’t be so angry. I’m just giving you some genuine advice. I still feel joy in seeing sorcery develop to its very limits, you know? As proof of that, I will graciously step back for today.”

“Bifrons’ mana dispersed from the area as if to prove this wasn’t a lie.

“Oh yes, one more thing. Does that power of yours have a name?”

Foll didn’t know what the Archdemon was getting at, but shook her head.

“Then allow me to bestow it one. Divine Echo. A godly sound capable of slaughtering even an Archdemon. It’s quite appropriate for you.”

And with that, Bifrons’ presence vanished completely.

I really don’t understand what goes through that Archdemon’s head.

And after sitting there dumbfounded for a few more seconds, Foll yelled out in anger to the skies.

“Why?! Didn’t?! You?! Tell that to Nephteros?!”

Yet her sorrowful cry vanished into the forest in vain.



“Hak!”

Bifrons coughed out blood and fell to the ground. The Archdemon was currently in one of their bases. Their original research base had been destroyed by Zagan. This one wasn't the size of a castle and was only about big enough to be used as a storage space for spare materials. But that's what made it the perfect hiding spot for Bifrons, considering the sorcery that Zagan had cast on them, and Shere Khan, who was also being hunted.

I wasn't even planning on playing around this time. What terrifying power... It wasn't beyond recovery, but Bifrons was still unable to speak. Zagan was quite the shrewd man to be hiding such a pawn to play while also having both Gremory and Kimaris serve as his hands. In truth, Zagan didn't count his family members among his subordinates, but that wasn't something Bifrons could comprehend.

Just as Foll inferred, Bifrons' sorcery manipulated crystallized mana. The Archdemon no longer possessed a true body. Each and every crystal was Bifrons, and any such cluster was also Bifrons. There was no longer any meaning to the word individuality to this Archdemon. Zagan may have been even more terrifying than this though, considering he was capable of casting such a complicated pledge on such a body.

The power that Valefor unleashed could be called Bifrons' natural enemy.

No sorcery can completely defend against it, since it's based on sound... And above all else, the sound dealt a blow to Bifrons' very existence. It was a truly nightmarish power that was impossible to avoid. In a complete state, there was even a chance of it killing Bifrons.

Furthermore, that was the power Zagan's elf used before. The Archdemon wasn't sure if Foll herself was aware of it, but that was the same as the celestial mysticism which struck Shere Khan on Alshire Imera, Algea Pathi. That one little girl manifested the power which was born of the collaboration between two high elves, two Archdemon candidates, the personal disciple of an active Archdemon, and an Archangel.

It wasn't something she'd stolen from Zagan, nor was it something she had learned from Nephelia. She'd refined it all on her own using what was given to her by her parents. But perhaps that was oversimplifying it. Using Heaven's Scale like a tuning fork was surely beyond Zagan's expectations as well. And this was something she had done in the desperate situation of facing an Archdemon on her own. Bifrons also felt compelled to praise her Celestian chant required for

the prayer. Her growth was miraculous. It was moving even for this Archdemon.

"I get it now. Watching the growth of a young sorcerer is actually quite pleasant. I see why Zagan put her at his side. I feel like it would even be fine to yield my Sigil to a girl like her."

Those were the true feelings of this Archdemon who could be considered to be the very picture of evil.

Bifrons' goal in infiltrating Zagan's castle was to secure Alshiera. The Archdemon wasn't planning on fooling around at all and was focused on fulfilling their contract with Shere Khan. In spite of that, Bifrons was repelled by a little girl. It was like she was a completely different person from the girl he met on that ship half a year ago. If she were to reach such a stage back before Zagan inherited his Sigil, Bifrons would have definitely recommended her for the position. The Archdemon truly felt respect at having been brought to a knee like this.

Hahaha... Me? Feel respect? How laughable. And having finally recovered enough to stand back up, Bifrons shook their head.

"Not yet. I can't afford to die yet."

The Archdemon now had a goal worth staking their life on. That was precisely why they joined hands with a cripple on death's door. The face that came to mind was none other than the cute and irritated face of their little doll.

"Why didn't you say that to Nephteros?!"

Bifrons did, in fact, hear what Valefor screamed in the end.

I wonder if things would've gone differently if I'd praised Nephteros... But the childish Archdemon laughed it off as nonsense.

"...Hahaha, that's none of your business."

If Bifrons still had such an honest heart, they wouldn't be an Archdemon.

Just then, the creaking sound of a wheelchair drew closer.

"Bi...frons... What... were you... doing...?"

"Hi there, my dear friend Shere Khan. It was nothing really, I just thought I'd help my sworn friend's research. Having said that, it seems I failed this time."

"That... is not... an opponent... you can defeat... by challenging... them... without... a plan," the tiger-faced sorcerer replied in a wheezing voice. He was likely referring to the vampire.

I think I'll keep quiet about not even getting anywhere close to Alshiera. Mhm... If Bifrons was to reveal such shameful information, they would paint a target on their back. And that would do them no good while Zagan's sorcery was still in place.

Bifrons let out a cheerful laugh.

"It's true that I was being rash... They may have sniffed this place

out, so let's move. Don't worry, I've still got plenty of bases that nobody knows about."

Bifrons went to push his wheelchair, but the tiger sorcerer shook his head. That one action surely took all the effort he could muster.

To think the Tiger King has been reduced to such a miserable state. His withered fingers looked like they would snap with just the tiniest amount of force. Such an evil inclination did cross Bifrons' mind, but they shook it off immediately. This man was right next to Andrealphus as one of the oldest Archdemons. It was natural to assume he had one or two trump cards prepared that Bifrons didn't know about.

The childish Archdemon then innocently cocked their head.

"What wrong, Shere Khan? Does my hiding place not suit you?"

"Setting... that aside... I have... a request."

"Hmm." Bifrons sighed. They never thought they'd hear such a laudable phrase from this tiger.

Looks like he's in the mood to cooperate for now... Or perhaps it was just an act to get Bifrons to think that way. In any case, there wasn't much in the world more enjoyable than a trade with an Archdemon.

"I'll do anything I can. We're sword friends, right? Ahaha!"

Bifrons brought their ear closer to Shere Khan to listen to his sword friend's request, then raised a brow.

"Azazel's Staff...?"

According to Shere Khan, it was a more realistic approach than targeting Alshiera.

Is that... something else entirely?

Azazel's Staff. The first thing that came to mind was the staff wielded by a certain girl. Bifrons knew that it was a Holy Treasure related to the name Azazel. However, it seemed that Shere Khan was talking about something else. He then added one more thing.

"Huh? Your subordinates already slipped in? Aah, and those children bungled it up... Haaah... We both have such problematic subordinates, huh?"

Bifrons felt some amount of sympathy due to the case with Nephteros.

Well, not that I really care just because he's asking me to do it. As long as it doesn't fall into an enemy's hands, at least.

Bifrons hoped it was an amusing toy, if nothing else. This childish Archdemon was truly a superior sorcerer worthy of endless respect, but Bifrons was rotten by nature.

"But... Azazel... Azazel's legacy, huh?" Bifrons repeated that name over and over as if savoring every drop of honey in their mouth.

To think a part of the legacy existed aside from my Sacred Sword... It was something Bifrons sent to clash against Zagan. Although, the Archdemon no longer possessed it. Even if they were capable of

guiding it, it was too difficult to control.

Sure, I had the matter with Nephteros to deal with, but throwing it away there was quite the waste... However, Zagan didn't realize that girl's true value. It was ridiculous. Shere Khan was so fixated on her precisely because he understood her value.

But I guess I don't really know what Shere Khan is plotting... Rare species hunts sounded fun and all, but he always muttered nonsense about protecting someone or salvation while in a daze. Although this man was given the title of Archdemon, he had obviously long since thrown away his sanity.

"So? The legacy is in the Holy City of Raziel? How troublesome. Well, I'll go and enjoy myself to the fullest."

Thus, Archdemons who were tied by fate all headed to the Holy City as if attracted by each other.



The following day, Zagan and Nephy had been jolted about in a carriage ever since the morning. They didn't return to the castle the previous evening but made use of an inn while making preparations for a carriage in Kianoides. They deployed a powerful barrier specifically for obstructing Gremory, so they didn't think they were discovered by her.

Zagan had taken off his sorcerer's robe and was instead wearing a silk shirt and trousers, a belt with a brass buckle, a crimson tie around his neck, and a black mantle as an overcoat. He was dressed just like a noble.

Nephy was wearing a white dress and a slightly transparent wool cardigan, which made her look gentle. It wasn't as gorgeous as her evening dress, but it gave her the feel of a refined daughter from a well-off family. Though, she naturally still had a boorish collar around her neck.

I feel like it'd be fine to take it off at times like this... However, Nephy refused to yield and emphasized that it was made for such moments. This collar was the first thing to connect Zagan and Nephy, after all. And he was honestly quite happy that she treated it so dearly.

The carriage they were in was big enough for six people, but Zagan had reserved it for himself, so it was just the two of them in the back. A deep voice then resounded through the carriage.

"My liege. We should arrive in the Holy City by nightfall at this pace."

"Hmm. That's faster than expected. Good work."

The one driving the carriage was Raphael. He had also changed out of his Valefor armor and was now wearing the armor of a regular knight. In this age, the word knight was largely synonymous with

Angelic Knights, but there were in fact knights who were not affiliated with the church. Their wages and status were conferred to them by the feudal lord, or king, of their land.

Well, the armor had no sorcery cast on it and didn't hold a candle to Anointed Armor though. Zagan's little group was under the guidance of a noble couple and their knight escort.

Nephy looked down at her own dress shyly and lifted it up slightly.

"This is my first time wearing clothes like this. I feel somewhat restless."

"You're right. But wearing different clothes from usual is nice, huh?"

Nephy is so damn cute! Why haven't I bought her more clothes like this?! Manuela was the one who picked out this outfit, as always. She did play around and tease Nephy to her heart's content as if it were perfectly natural, but Zagan allowed it this time. This was their first trip together on their own, after all.

Up until that point, they had gone on trips to the lake and the bottom of the ocean, but they had never been all alone.

Zagan took another look at Nephy, who was sitting next to him. Manuela really was good at picking out clothes. They were trim and stylish. Anybody who saw her would be charmed by her loveliness.

"I quite like the clothes you have on now, Nephy. I even want to go around looking for more like that. Well, I'll refrain if you don't want to though."

"There's no way I would refuse!" Nephy's red ears stiffened out to a point. She then twiddled her fingers as she continued shyly. "Um, in that case... I also think that your clothes are... w-wonderful, Master Zagan."

Hnnnngh! What a thing to say! He thought she was going to express her happiness over wearing such cute clothes, but she ended up counterattacking when he least expected it. And yet the way she constantly corrected the position of her skirt and cardigan conveyed how pleased she was with them.

"I-I see. Then... should we look for clothes while we're in the Holy City?"

"Y-Yes!"

And then silence. After a short while, Nephy hesitantly opened her mouth to speak.

"Um, is it really all right?"

"Is what all right?"

"I have to take care of Kuroka, yet we left the castle..."

Zagan was trying to escape Gremory's surveillance, so he'd practically abducted Nephy and run away. It was only natural for

Nephy to be anxious.

I still can't tell her about Orias... Their trip to the Holy City was related to her, but he still couldn't bring himself to tell Nephy the truth.

Zagan leaned back into his seat.

"Hear me, Nephy, that's exactly why we're going."

"What do you mean?"

"Mmm... I know you're feeling tense over such an important matter. However, that can lead to your nerves snapping at a crucial moment. Trust me, you need to relax because this is such a serious situation."

Nephy nodded but cocked her head.

"I've never seen you relax in such a manner, though, Master Zagan..."

"Huh? I'm always less tense when I'm with you, aren't I?"

"What? Uh, um, to be honest, it feels like you grow more tense around me..."

Zagan became quite flustered after having something so unexpected pointed out to him.

"Aaah, um... You're not wrong... But it's the same for you, right?"

"Th-That's, uh..."

Despite eight months passing since they'd begun living together, the two of them didn't appear to have grown at all. They turned as red as lobsters, and Raphael called out to them with a strained smile.

"My liege. My apologies for interrupting you while you relax, but may I say something?"

"What is it?"

"It's better if you do not mention the name Zagan while in the Holy City. I'm sure it's not something you would pay any mind to, but it will bring about obstructions."

This had completely slipped Zagan's mind, and he returned a nod.

"You're right. We should avoid mentioning an Archdemon's name if we want to enjoy some sightseeing."

Nephy tilted her head in a troubled manner.

"Then what should I call you, Master Zagan? Perhaps just Master, like before...?"

"It's a date. You can't just call me Master."

"Ah... A date...!"

Apparently, she didn't realize this... Or perhaps she was just trying not to be conscious of it. Nephy's ears turned redder and redder.

"But this is a problem... I've never thought of using an alias."

Zagan didn't want to use a lousy name if Nephy was to refer to him that way. But he didn't even know his own real name. He had no idea what name he wanted to go by after all this time. Such was the

case, but the driver replied as if the answer was perfectly obvious.

“What are you saying? Won’t everything be settled with ‘dear’ and ‘honey’ and the like?”

Zagan and Nephy both stiffened up completely.

Sure, Nephy’s now my bride, but it’s not like we actually ever got married. We just confirmed our feelings for each other... How do I explain that I don’t hate the idea, or rather, that I’m actually extremely interested in it, but I feel like it’s too soon? No, wait, is it really too soon?

Even the brain of an Archdemon was incapable of processing such a shocking suggestion. All Zagan could do was laugh while his eyes spun in circles.

“Huh? ‘Honey’...? Is that not... um, a little too bold?”

Nephy covered her face as if she was unable to bear it, but she then peeked through her fingers as if mustering her courage.

“R-Right... D-D-Dear..?”

“Hnnngh!”



Zagan fell from his seat while grasping his chest, a shock running through his entire body. He would surely have died if he wasn't a sorcerer.

What resolve! What speedy determination! His bride was a step ahead of him in this regard... Well, she was one who seriously complied with his embarrassing and nonsensical requests all the time. So a slightly higher hurdle wasn't all that difficult for her to surmount.

Being unable to answer in kind would have wounded his pride. And so Zagan suppressed his rapidly beating heart and rose to his feet, mustering all of his willpower to do so. He then looked straight at Nephy's blindingly cute face and opened his mouth.

"H-Honey..."

"Eek!"

And in an unusual turn, Nephy let out a yelp and sank to the floor. Her ears were so red it felt like they were generating a significant amount of heat, and her eyes peeking through the gap in her fingers even had tears in them.

The two of them were out of breath as if they had just run a marathon at full sprint and somehow managed to return to their seats.

"There's a need... to get accustomed to this..." Zagan stated.

"Is that... even possible... I wonder...?" Nephy replied.

In any case, he was grateful that Raphael had pointed it out now rather than later. The butler likely knew this was exactly how it would turn out.

Zagan fanned his face with his hand in a fluster.

"....."

"....."

Realizing that they were both doing the same thing, Nephy and Zagan spontaneously began fanning each other instead.

Th-This kinda makes me happy... It felt like it was getting even hotter, but neither of them showed any signs of stopping.

About half an hour later...

"My liege, there are people on the road in front of us."

"Hm? All the way out here?"

"It seems they're stranded."

Zagan opened the window and took a look for himself. The terrain around them was an empty wasteland. There were no rivers or lakes in the area, so this region was barren. It wasn't suitable for habitation, which meant the only things to pass through here were pretty much just merchant carriages.

A town or two would come into sight after a few hours by carriage, so this wasn't a place anybody would come to without a horse. And now there were two people in the middle of this wasteland

just standing there in complete isolation.

“That armor... they’re Angelic Knights. I suppose their horses were done in while they were out on a mission of some sort.”

Anointed Armor was quite heavy, although the one wearing it didn’t feel this. Spurring on a horse too hard while wearing such armor could easily crush the horse. Zagan honestly didn’t want to get involved with Angelic Knights while sightseeing with Nephy, but...

A woman and a child... The woman was wearing a helmet, so he couldn’t see her face, but her armor was clearly shaped for a woman. The other one wasn’t wearing a helmet and looked to be a young boy.

Zagan sat back down in the carriage with a grimace.

“Stop for them. They’ll freeze to death if we leave them be at this time of year.”

“Is that all right?”

“We found them, so there’s no other choice.”

It was irritating that they were getting in the way of his private time with Nephy, but they would remain on his mind if he abandoned them here and went to the Holy City. And that would get in the way of enjoying his trip. Zagan then looked over to Nephy.

“Aah, that’s how it is. Sorry. It looks like we’ll have some extra guests. Do you mind?”

Nephy replied with a delighted smile.

“Of course not, Master Za... Oh...” So she started to say, but she tensed up and corrected herself. “Of course not, dear.”



“We’re in a hurry to get to the Holy City of Raziel. Excuse me for asking, but could you allow us aboard?”

After bringing the carriage to a stop, the young boy called out to Zagan in an energetic voice. Upon asking him, he informed them that he was thirteen. He had chestnut hair and green eyes. His features gave off an upright and serious impression, and it really did look like it was too early for him to be wearing his armor.

The woman’s face was still hidden by her helmet, but she was about the same height as the boy. She had an even smaller build than Nephy, and judging from her perfectly straight posture and the way she held herself, it was apparent that she was quite young as well.

However, Zagan didn’t perceive this young boy as an apprentice, even though his appearance suggested it.

That sword at his waist is definitely a Sacred Sword. It’s the first I’ve heard of a brat being an Archangel. Zagan wasn’t aware of how skilled he was, but the sword meant the boy was an Angelic Knight on par with Raphael and Chastille. It didn’t sound enjoyable to be accompanied by such a troublesome guest all the way to the Holy

City.

But he did already stop the carriage, so Zagan spread out his arm as if it didn't bother him.

"I don't mind. We also happen to be on our way to the Holy City. Come on in and relax."

"Thank you. You really saved us."

The boy bobbed his head down then turned to the woman next to him.

"Come now, Lady Oberon."

Zagan noticed the woman stiffening up as he urged her on.

Hmm? Does this woman know who I am? Chastille was also an Archangel. It wasn't all that strange for Angelic Knights from other cities to visit her, and Zagan hadn't just visited her at the church once or twice. It was fairly likely that Angelic Knights Zagan didn't know of could recognize his face.

"...I'll be fine," the woman said as she shook her head.

"What are you saying? How do you plan on getting back without a carriage? Please get on."

She didn't appear to be carrying a Sacred Sword, but the Archangel was bowing to her. It seemed that she was someone of significant status. The woman looked up at Zagan, then she shook her head once more.

Huh? Is that a signal that she won't remove her helmet? Zagan wasn't planning on making a fuss of it just because she wouldn't remove her helmet. It would be nonsense for a sorcerer who was hiding his identity in a far more dangerous way to complain about a mere helmet. And yet he felt like that wasn't all there was to the woman's behavior. He cocked his head to the side, and his eyes met those of the woman behind her helmet.

"—!"

And Zagan figured it out in an instant.

I don't know why it ended up like this, but I guess I get it for now.

Zagan opened the door of the carriage all the way and urged the two of them in.

"I can't possibly leave two Angelic Knights out here. Please get in."

"...Sorry. We'll be intruding."

The woman—who was apparently named Oberon—squeezed out those words and bowed her head. Her voice sounded young... or rather, childish. She was also quite short, giving off the impression that she was even younger than Nephy.

Zagan continued to observe her and let out a laugh.

"Nothing of the sort. You're more than welcome."

In an extremely unusual turn for Zagan, he held out his hand and

escorted her to her seat. The young boy also took off his sword belt and boarded the carriage, but upon noticing Nephy, he came to a stop and stared at her in wonder.

“Huh...? An elf?”

Well, even Angelic Knights didn’t have many opportunities to encounter any elves. Nephy bobbed her head to greet him back, and after the two of them were on board, Raphael closed the door and urged the horses on once more.

“Umm, this is quite a nice carriage. Does it belong to you?”

“No, we only rented it in town. I don’t know anything about carriages.”

“I-Is that so...?”

And then silence.

The boy once more shifted his gaze to Nephy’s collar. Zagan and Nephy treated it as a perfectly natural accessory that they weren’t ashamed of at all, but it wasn’t all that amusing to have such an unreserved gaze pointed at it.

“Does it bother you?”

It may have been somewhat mean-spirited, but Zagan questioned the boy.

“No, I couldn’t possibly...” He started to deny it, but then shook his head as if changing his mind. “This may be rather rude to ask after being allowed to board your carriage, but how are you two related?”

“I wonder... What do we look like?”

Zagan laughed, clearly amused, and the boy turned red in the cheeks with resentment.

“Could you stop teasing—hwah?! ”

Just as he tried to stand to his feet, the woman next to him flicked his forehead. She then began speaking in a somewhat troubled tone.

“...Lovers, right? You can tell at a glance...”

Zagan’s bold expression crumbled in an instant and he began blushing. Nephy also covered her mouth on reflex.

To think it’d be so embarrassing to have it pointed out...! He tried scratching his cheek to regain his composure from such an unexpected blow.

“Uhh, right. Well, that’s how it is. It doesn’t feel good to have such strange looks pointed at my bride.”

“...Sorry. That was insensitive of me.”

The boy apologized seriously and bowed to Zagan, making the atmosphere even more awkward.

What to do? I’d hoped to use this as practice for talking to people we might meet in the Holy City... It was unexpected for the atmosphere to make everyone feel awkward.

And the one to break the silence, unable to bear it any longer, was

none other than Oberon.

"I apologize for my companion's discourtesy. I don't mean this as a way of making up for that, but do you have any interest in a psychological test?"

"A psychological test?"

"It's like a simple game with words. It's used by Angelic Knights to try and smoke out sorcerers."

Zagan shrugged his shoulders exaggeratedly.

"How frightening. Are you perhaps suspicious of us?"

"Nothing of the sort. This is just for entertainment. I'll refrain if you don't feel like it."

Zagan took a glance over at Nephy. She was somewhat confused, but her pointy ears were twitching about in interest. So Zagan corrected his posture and spread out his arms.

"No, please go ahead. It sounds interesting."

Oberon nodded slightly and continued.

"You arrive at a dining table and find four items lined up before you: a dessert, a bowl of soup, a drink, and a meat dish. However, one among these items is actually a person held captive by a sorcerer. Which do you think it is?"

Zagan didn't understand the intent of the question, but it certainly didn't sound like something capable of probing the identity of a sorcerer, so he answered honestly.

"The soup. A drink is too conspicuous, and the delicate flavors of a dessert makes it easy to realize something is wrong. In a similar vein, meat takes a long time to eat, which leaves a long time to figure things out."

"Hmm. And what do you think?"

Oberon looked at Nephy, and she nodded back.

"Let's see... I also think it's the soup. I can't really think of a reason, but that's the first thing that came to mind."

"That's fine. Just as I said before, this is nothing more than a simple game. You don't need to ponder it too deeply."

And lastly, all gazes gathered on the young boy.

"I think it's the dessert. People will relax the most when they get to dessert."

Oberon nodded without much of a reaction.

"I see. Those answers do seem to suit all of you."

"And what's your answer?" Zagan asked, but Oberon smiled back bitterly.

"I know the way the question works, so it'd be unfair to answer myself."

"Is that how it goes...? So, what meaning is there behind the question?" Zagan asked carefully, and Oberon replied nonchalantly.

“It’s a test about whether you’re capable of finding a lover.”

Everyone broke into a coughing fit at such an unexpected answer.

“Wha? L-L-L-L-L-Lovers...?” Nephry sputtered.

“Let’s start with you two who answered with soup...” Oberon completely disregarded everyone’s agitation and mercilessly cut forth. “Those who pick soup are the ones who are trying to act calm in front of others but are actually perceived as having a great amount of fun by those around them. This isn’t definitive, but there’s apparently a strong trend in people who make that choice.”

“Th-Th-Th-Th-Th-That can’t be!”

“R-R-R-R-Right!”

“Umm, it’s all right,” the young boy said as he averted his gaze... “It’s just a game.”

“Ugh...”

Zagan groaned, completely unable to refute him, and Oberon ruthlessly continued.

“Next is you, who picked the dessert.”

The boy quickly turned pale.

“L-Lady Oberon, there’s no need to...”

“You’re the type to be deeply influenced by others. You should be careful in picking your partner.”

“G-Guhhhh....!”

The boy began trembling and looked like he was on the verge of tears.

“This is the first time I’ve tasted such humiliation,” Zagan commented out of the blue.

“Does it displease you?”

“Not at all. It’s rather amusing. Do you have more?”

“Let’s see...”

Oberon appeared to be unsociable at first, but she turned out to be quite skilled at conversation. She brought up more strange examples of her psychological tests and managed to surprise the others every single time. Before they knew it, she was also smiling. Despite not being able to see her face, she truly gave off a feeling of a young girl engrossed with talks of love and fashion quite appropriate for her youthful voice.

A while later, the carriage arrived at the Holy City. The sky was dyed red by the setting sun. Zagan thought it would have taken more than a day to traverse this road, but they arrived before nightfall just as Raphael had predicted.

Oberon then changed the topic as if suddenly remembering something.

“Oh yes, I forgot to ask you earlier. What business do you two have in the Holy City?”

“Nothing serious. I’m looking for something... or someone. We’re also here to genuinely enjoy some sightseeing.”

“Looking for someone?”

Zagan shifted his gaze over to Nephy, whose expression had softened up completely.

“There’s someone I’d like her to meet, and they may be here in town. Well, the need for it may have vanished thanks to you, though.”

It felt like his primary goal of relieving Nephy’s tension had already been accomplished.

“Hmm. I’ll give you a call if I happen to see them.”

“Aah, that’d be great.”

Zagan then returned the question.

“I suppose you two are here for work?”

There was no other reason for Angelic Knights to come to the Holy City, and Oberon nodded.

“Yes. Also, I guess you can say I came here to retrieve something that was once entrusted to me.”

“I see. I pray that it ends well for you.”

The carriage came to a stop. Apparently, they had arrived at the church. Nephy then held her hand out to Oberon.

“Um, talking with you was fun. Thank you very much.”

Even behind her helmet, it was clear that Oberon’s eyes shot open before she shook Nephy’s hand.

“I’m the one who should be thanking you. I’m glad we met.”

The boy then held out his hand to Zagan as well.

“Sorry for saying something so rude at first. I was able to escort Lady Oberon to the Holy City thanks to you. It was quite a fun trip, too.”

“Don’t worry about it. I was also amused.”

Those words came from Zagan’s heart.

I mean, Nephy had fun and all!

Oberon and the boy then dismounted the carriage.

“They were an interesting pair, weren’t they?”

“Yes,” Nephy said, then she paused, cocked her head, and continued. “Huh? But she never asked who it was that you were searching for, Master Zagan.”

Zagan shrugged his shoulders lightly and held his hand out to Nephy.

“Anyway, our date starts now. Let’s go.”

And with a slight blush to her cheeks, Nephy took his hand.

“Yes, dear.”



Around the time Zagan arrived in the Holy City of Raziel,

Chastille found herself in the central cathedral. Over ten thousand visitors stopped by every day. Cardinals and archbishops gave sermons in the chapel, where devout believers offered their thanks and confessed their sins. And Chastille was currently about a dozen meters beneath that location.

This was where the crypt would be located in a normal church, but a large round table was enshrined beneath the cathedral. There were twelve seats, the same number as the Sacred Swords which symbolized the church's power. Chastille arrived at her seat, a chair engraved with the name of her Sacred Sword, Azrael.

There were still vacant seats even though their meeting was supposed to start soon. And because of that, the air already felt tense. The weak of heart would surely faint from just stepping foot in the room.

Chastille held back her sigh in the heavy atmosphere. Her figure, clad in Anointed Armor and with her crimson hair tied to the side, was truly gallant and beautiful. This was her public image during "work mode" that hid her crybaby self.

An Angelic Knight with a large build plunked down in the seat across from her. He was close to 40 years old. His muscular build was large enough that it looked cramped within his Anointed Armor. He stroked his plentiful mustache and plainly showed his contempt for her.

"Hmph. How strange. There's a traitor here in the sacred cathedral."

"What a dire situation, Lord Kaltiainen. Do you require my aid?"

Chastille was more than prepared for this level of ridicule, so she replied with a cool air about her. The large Angelic Knight, Kaltiainen, ground his teeth and glared back at her.

"Stop that, both of you. We did not gather today to quarrel amongst ourselves."

A knight with long hair kept the two of them in check. This knight was still young, and looked to be just around 30. He had loose wavy blonde hair and blue eyes. His looks and the way he held himself were the ideal image of a knight. He was seated directly to Chastille's right.

Kaltiainen shot him a deathly glare.

"Stay out of this, Valjakka. This isn't the place for such a dainty man to cut in."

"I beg to differ. Lady Lillqvist is a woman before she is an Angelic Knight. And a knight must respect a woman, no?"

Valjakka brushed back his bangs and smiled provocatively, to which Kaltiainen returned a disconcerted look.

"Hmph. Knights? You mean murderers. All we're here for is to destroy those fucking sorcerers. Leave justice and chivalry and all that

other nonsense to the oh-so-holy cardinals to prattle about.”

Kaltiainen practically spat out his words, reclined in his seat, and shut his mouth. The high-quality oak chair creaked as if it was about to break from the stress. Valjakka took a sidelong glance at the crude Angelic Knight, then shook his head as he spoke to Chastille in a somewhat intimate tone.

“Just as hot-headed as ever, isn’t he? But Lady Lillqvist, I can’t say that I find such provocative behavior from you all that admirable. Are you at least aware of what position you find yourself in here?”

“Your concern is unnecessary, Lord Valjakka. I’m not such a feeble maiden that I require such pity.”

“You’ll always be a feeble maiden to me. I’ll never be able to face Sylvester if something were to happen to you.”

That was the name of Chastille’s brother who died five years ago. He once served as Valjakka’s adjutant.

“...I know.”

Chastille’s shoulders drooped down, and Valjakka couldn’t help but sigh. He then took another look at the other seats around the table.

“But you really should restrain yourself for now. Everyone is quite worked up.” And with that as a preface, his tone turned grim.

“Because one of the twelve Sacred Swords has fallen into the hands of an Archdemon.”

It meant that one of the twelve seats in this room would forever be empty. It was the reason Chastille was called here, the reason the eleven remaining Archangels were summoned to assemble.

A dull clang resounded throughout the room as Kaltiainen struck the sheathe of his Sacred Sword against the floor.

“There’s no way a man of Raphael’s caliber lost in a direct confrontation. He must have fallen prey to a cowardly trap set by one of those filthy sorcerers!”

The Archangels entrusted with the Sacred Swords were still human. It was normal for them to lose their lives in battle. And every time that happened, it was up to the remaining eleven Archangels to see that the Sacred Sword was handed over to its next wielder.

The ceremony of passing down the Sacred Swords had gone on for hundreds of years. This was the first time that a Sacred Sword meant to be passed to another was lost with its wielder. And just the other day, it came to light that it had fallen into the hands of Archdemon Zagan.

Not that it fell to him or anything... Lord Raphael is still alive and well... Chastille was the only one who knew this, but there was no way she could say that. Kaltiainen’s stony face was now soaked in tears, perhaps because he was well acquainted with Raphael.

Just then, the door to the room opened unceremoniously, and the completely unmotivated voice of a middle-aged man filled the air.

“Oh come on, what’s with the commotion? Anyways, stop crying Kaltiainen. Here, take my handkerchief... Yeah, I know, Raphael was a good guy.”

This man also understood that it was time to mourn Raphael’s loss. Kaltiainen took the handkerchief and replied while sobbing.

“Ooooh! Don’t say it Diekmeyer! I never...! I never knew another man who could kill sorcerers with such a refreshing air about him! He was the first man I ever respected!”

“...Hey. How about you stop dribbling your snot everywhere?”

The one to sit down next to the dejected Kaltiainen was a middle-aged knight... Michael Diekmeyer. After noticing Chastille, he casually raised his hand to her.

“Yo, Chastille. Been about a month, right?”

“Have you had enough of the sea already, Lord Michael?”

Chastille replied, and Michael turned pale as he shook his head.

“Please, no more. I finally got called back here. I don’t even want to remember the sea.”

Michael smiled weakly, but knowing his true identity, Chastille couldn’t take his behavior at face value.

Archdemon Andrealphus... I still can’t believe that I’m meeting him like this. The man said to be the strongest Archangel, who went by the name Michael here, was also the sorcerer who served as the head Archdemon. She had no idea what to believe anymore given his usually flippant attitude.

These four knights were the only ones in the room who stood out with their speech and conduct. The other Angelic Knights simply sat in their seats and remained silent. Not everyone was present yet, but the silent knights were the relatively young ones. There was one among them in his thirties named Hartonen, who was famous for his taciturnity, but there were more people present from Chastille’s generation.

It hasn’t even been a year since they inherited the Sacred Swords, so it’s somewhat understandable. Chastille was accustomed to it, since she’d inherited her Sacred Sword at the age of thirteen. When she first became an Archangel though, she was probably just like them.

The reason there were so many young Archangels was because nearly half of the preceding Archangels had died in battle a year ago. It was the battle Raphael would have died in had he not sipped on Orobas’ blood.

The young Archangels were those who had inherited the Sacred Swords after that. It was only normal for them to keep quiet at a meeting commemorating the death of the Archangel known as the

most dreadful while a senior Archangel like Kaltiainen was ranting and raving.

But that heavy atmosphere shattered in an instant.

“Oh, isn’t that Chastille? Haven’t seen you since Alshire Imera, huh?”

A familiar voice called out to Chastille like they had no idea how to read the room, and Chastille shot up to her feet and stared back in wonder.

“S-Stella? Why...?”

She was Zagan’s childhood friend and sister-figure. She had red hair like Chastille’s and a single red eye. Her other eye was hidden by her bangs. She was wearing a sorcerer’s robe the last time Chastille met her, but today she was wearing the formal ceremonial clothes of an Angelic Knight.

Stella let out a troubled laugh.

“I don’t really get it, but I was told to come along. What to do? Ahahaha...”

“Oh, you’re late, Stella. Not that you have a seat. Just stand behind me.”

“...What? I don’t even get a chair? Why’d I have to come along then?”

Stella sounded completely out of place, and Kaltiainen yelled at her with a vein popping out of his forehead.

“Shut it, woman! This isn’t the place for the likes of you!”

His choice of words was somewhat high-handed, but he wasn’t entirely wrong. Only Archangels were supposed to be allowed in this room. Both Nephteros and Richard were standing by outside because of this. It wasn’t clear whether Stella was aware of this, but she simply replied with a ferocious smile.

“Hah? It’s not like I came here ’cause I wanted to, ya know?”

The silver eye beneath her bangs gave off an ominous glow.

Chastille had built an amicable relationship with this girl because of her friendship with Zagan, but it didn’t change the fact that she was a sorcerer. There was no way she could leave a good impression on an Angelic Knight.

Wait a sec! Is she planning on rampaging here?! She was Zagan’s family. Chastille considered her an ally, but she didn’t think they could win against nearly ten other Archangels.

No, maybe we can? Lord Michael’s on her side too, so isn’t it possible? Stella possessed enough strength to give off that impression. But if the other Archangels were to find out about her identity, there was no way they would let her get away with her life.

Chastille turned pale, and the no-good geezer who also couldn’t read the room smiled as he clapped his hands.

“Mmm! Your teacher’s proud to see you deepening your bonds already, but let’s be just a bit gentler, okay? I mean, look. Kaltiainen’s totally ready to draw his sword.”

He didn’t quite have his hand on the hilt of his sword, but Kaltiainen was glaring at Michael with enough bloodlust that it was completely implied that he would cut him down if he took a single step forward.

“Hey, is this fucking woman an acquaintance of yours?”

“Hm? Oh, yeah. Let me introduce her. This is my disciple, Stella. I plan on recommending her when the next vacancy for a Sacred Sword opens up, so I brought her along.”

Even Stella looked at Michael in complete shock.

“...Huh? That’s the first I’ve heard of this though?”

“What? I never told you?”

Michael reacted like he was fooling around, leading even the other Angelic Knights who had remained quiet to shout while still remaining sharply alert of him.

“So you mean she’s an Archangel candidate, Lord Diekmeyer?!”

“Why do you have to bring up something so important in such a ridiculous manner?!”

The ones who criticized him in exasperation were two knights who looked very similar.

“Oh, you two Juutilainen brothers sure do get along, huh?”

These Archangels were brothers who had both inherited Sacred Swords. The older brother was 20, while the younger brother had only inherited the Sacred Sword a few days ago at the age of 17. Both of them possessed enough skill to be ranked in the top five at the swordsmanship school in the Holy City.

The two of them were able to talk frankly with Michael despite their ages precisely because of his flippant personality. However, Chastille may have been the one who was most thrown off by this new information.

Stella is an Archangel candidate...? Was this the reason Archdemon Andrealphus went as far as lowering his head to Zagan to leave Stella under his care? And was Zagan aware of this? Chastille groaned and noticed a small girl peeking into the room through the door Stella had come in from.

Is that the girl I met on Alshire Imera...? Chastille had yet to sit back down, and she rushed over towards the girl.

“Oh, you’re...”

“Chastille. You’re Lisette, right?”

Lisette nodded back slightly. She was wearing neat and tidy clothes like the daughter of a noble, in complete contrast to what Chastille had seen her wearing before.

I thought she stayed with Zagan, but I guess Stella is taking care of her.

“Is she going to be okay?” Lisette asked in a trembling voice.

Chastille smiled and brushed her head to get her to calm down.

“It’s all right. Stella is stronger than I am. She won’t lose to people of this level.”

She was doing her best to comfort the little girl, but her choice of words was clearly wrong.

“...Hey, can you stop fanning the flames?” Michael said as he started to feel a migraine erupt. Kaltiainen’s veins were already popping, and now he leaped to his feet with his Sacred Sword in hand.

“Very well. I’ll take you on.”

“Hey, come on, cut it out. There’s no need for you to glare down an apprentice like that, right?”

“Nope. I can smell the stench of a sorcerer from this one. I can’t stand it!”

“Huh? Seriously?”

Michael surely didn’t think she would be exposed by scent, so he began sniffing his own armpits to check himself as well.

Well, Lord Michael will be the most troubled one here if her identity is exposed... Chastille thought.

And just as Kaltiainen was about to draw his sword with bloodshot eyes...

“Stop right there!”



Another Angelic Knight came in from behind Lisette. It was a boy who was still thirteen, putting him around the same age as Lisette. His stature was small enough that his Anointed Armor looked too big for him. He had chestnut hair and green eyes, and he conducted himself in a serious manner. Chastille wasn't aware of this, but it was the same boy who had accompanied Zagan in his carriage along with an elven Angelic Knight.

The majority of those in this room were reminded of the name of another man by this boy's presence. And the one to laugh in good humor at that was, of course, none other than Michael.

"You're late, Junior. All the geezers got here on time. It's not admirable for the young ones to be late."

"Lord Michael was also late."

Chastille got a quick quip in, and Michael averted his gaze with a whistle.

"I apologize for being late," the young boy said with a sigh. "But Lord Diekmeyer, please stop calling me Junior."

Michael slapped his own forehead shamelessly at his slip of the tongue.

"Oops. My bad. Head Archangel Ginias Galahad II."

This boy was, in fact, the one who served as the head of all Archangels. He was the child of the previous Head Archangel Ginias Galahad, who had lost his life in the battle against the demons. He was right next to Chastille as the youngest in history to be appointed the title of Archangel.

All eyes in the room naturally converged on him, but there was one other who disregarded that entirely and entered the room. It was another Angelic Knight who wasn't all that different in stature from Ginias. She looked to be a woman and was wearing a helmet that hid her face, despite being indoors.

Kaltiainen shot a glare over to her.

"Hey! Do you not know where you are, woman?! Attendants are meant to wait outside!"

"Lord Kaltiainen! This lady is..."

Ginias was in a fluster, while Michael, who was sitting next to Kaltiainen, was in complete shock

"...What the? Why are you here?"

"Hmm? Someone you know, Diekmeyer?"

"I mean, I kinda do, but..."

Michael scratched his head in a troubled manner, while the woman undid her sword belt as if she found this entire ordeal troublesome. It was, of course, not a Sacred Sword. It was a regular sword with a slender blade, but its hilt had a crest of a cross and a

lion engraved on it. And the moment she saw that crest, Chastille gulped. More specifically, everyone in the room gulped.

"I'll be attending today's meeting. Will you understand if I name myself as Oberon?"

A shockwave ran through the room at the mention of that name. Even Kaltiainen shot to his feet in panic. And that only stood to reason. The name Oberon was as sacred as God in the church. It was deified to the point that legends of Oberon defeating an Archdemon hundreds of years ago were still passed down.

I do think it's an embellished story though... Or so Chastille thought. In any case, people bearing that name were practically non-existent because of that.

"Oh dear," Michael said with a troubled laugh before proclaiming, "you've got a much cuter voice than I thought you'd—oomph?!"

"Watch your mouth, Diekmeyer! Is she not one we must all devote our swords to?!"

Kaltiainen pushed Michael's head to the table and deeply bowed down himself.

"Allow me to apologize for my previous comment. There is none more suitable to this place than you are."

"Hey, Chastille. Who's that? Actually, isn't that geezer's attitude totally different from when I came in?"

"Oberon is the name of the technician who created all the church's Anointed Armor and relics."

In short, to the church, losing her would be the same as losing the ability to fight against sorcerers. That's why her existence was a secret among secrets within the church. She was revered like a god, and both her face and location were kept completely confidential.

"So she's a big shot?"

It still wasn't ringing a bell with Stella, and Chastille held back a bitter smile as she put it as simply as possible.

"Well, she's enough of a big shot that Lord Kaltiainen is standing at attention for her."

Chastille had heard that the technician had been named Oberon for generations, but the current Oberon seemed to be quite the young girl. And after observing her for a while, Chastille knit her brows.

"...What?" Oberon asked as she noticed Chastille's gaze.

"Oh, pardon me. I just felt like I've heard your voice before."

"Is that so...? I do believe this is our first time meeting."

"I do too, but..."

Who was she? It felt like it wasn't all that long ago, but she couldn't pin it down. And before Chastille could find an answer, Michael began cackling.

"We can't possibly have you stand all this time, Lady Oberon. I

feel kinda bad for Raphael, but how about taking his seat?"

There were surely those who weren't convinced by such a proposition, but nobody voiced an objection. Kaltainen simply drooped his shoulders dejectedly.

"Raphael was a man with a strong sense of duty. He surely wouldn't allow a woman to remain standing. Please make use of Metatron's seat, Lady Oberon."

"...Got it."

All twelve seats were now accounted for with Ginias and Oberon's arrival. And after watching Oberon return a small nod and walk towards her seat, Stella whispered to Chastille once more in discontent.

"Isn't that geezer saying the complete opposite of what he told me? Can I slug him?"

"I understand how you feel, but please endure it, Stella."

Thus, the meeting that had Chastille's stomach churning began.



"We have two topics to discuss today. The first is the fact that Lord Hyurandell's Sacred Sword Metatron has fallen into the hands of Archdemon Zagan."

Ginias started the meeting in a firm tone. He was still fulfilling his duty as the head Archangel despite his young age.

"It's a grave situation. One that has never occurred before in the church's entire history."

However, Michael immediately voiced his doubt.

"Uhh, about that. Where'd the intel on this come from anyway? It's been half a year since Raphael went missing. So why'd we only find out about this now?"

Chastille also nodded.

"I'm in agreement with Lord Michael regarding this matter. Both Lord Raphael's last battle and Archdemon Zagan's base were in Kianoides, which is under my jurisdiction. So why wasn't I informed of this first?"

Kaltainen let out a snort.

"Hmph. There are tons of rumors that you're colluding with those damned sorcerers. Be honest, weren't you covering up this information the whole time?"

He was so entirely on point that Chastille was too embarrassed to reply.

"It's not collusion, it's *unification*. It's not like she's serving the sorcerers or anything, right?"

"E-Exactly!"

Chastille grabbed hold of the lifeline Michael threw her, but the

reaction of those in the room was cold.

Well, this much is to be expected... Chastille didn't have any supporters among the Archangels or anyone of equivalent or higher rank. Michael could be considered neutral, so even though he was somewhat cooperative, he wasn't an ally of hers.

"Unification my ass. Sacred Swords exist to kill sorcerers. The crap you're spouting is like saying we should all get along with blades at each other's throats."

He was an unpleasant man, but he did have a point. Michael began happily slapping Kaltiainen's back.

"Haha, I can't really refute that. I kinda like how you avoid claiming that your way is justice, ya know?"

"And what exactly do I have to gain by being liked by you?"

Kaltiainen looked extremely displeased, but Michael wasn't agitated in the least. Ginias then cleared his throat with a cough.

"The source of the information is being kept secret."

"Meaning it came from the cardinals? I really hate those guys. They keep a whole load of secrets and only ever say things that are convenient for them."

"Lord Diekmeyer! You go too far!"

"Nope. I'm gonna vent. I spent a whole month doing work at the bottom of the gloomy sea! You really think you can stop me from resenting them for it?"

Michael was practically in tears, while Ginias was completely overawed by his behavior and shrank back.

"...I'll voice your protests to the cardinals. I'm sure they're aware that it'll all be over were you to revolt against them, Lord Diekmeyer."

Valjakka then chimed in as well.

"Lord Galahad, you said there were two topics at hand. Is the other one something as dire as the loss of a Sacred Sword?"

"I'll be the one to speak of that," Oberon answered. She stood to her feet and continued in a quiet voice. "There's a relic being stored in Razel's treasury called Azazel's Staff."

That name caught Chastille's immediate attention.

Azazel... That's the name Zagan is investigating.

She then took a look around to check everybody's reactions.

One, two... five people. That's a lot... It was surely the first time half the people had heard that name. She could tell that some of them were pondering what that name meant with puzzled looks. However, there were also some who weren't.

The first was Michael. As both an Archdemon and Archangel, he likely held the most information regarding seraphs, Marchosias, and many other matters. He had the same faint smile as always, and his expression didn't change at all at the mention of Azazel.

The others who showed no reaction at all were Ginias and Valjakka. Ginias likely heard about it directly from Oberon, but it was also possible to consider that he knew something as the Head Archangel. As for Valjakka, he was a veteran whose only senior was Raphael. Taking into consideration the time he spent as an Archangel, it was fair to consider that he'd heard something of it.

The ones who reacted very clearly to this were Kaltiainen and the older Juutilainen.

"Azazel?" Kaltiainen practically spat out. "Isn't that the name of that secret order those cardinals use?"

"So you're aware of it, Lord Kaltiainen. I've heard that Azazel was annihilated though."

This was the first Chastille had heard of this, and she opened her eyes wide in shock.

"Lord Juutilainen, could you tell me a little more about that?"

"I don't really mind. It happened just over a year ago. Azazel's ace at the time apparently failed a mission and was beyond recovery. The mission in question seemed to be related to an Archdemon, and taking advantage of the ace's absence, the Archdemon retaliated and wiped Azazel out. I don't know if there are any survivors."

Chastille groaned at this information.

By ace, he probably means Kuroka... She could keep up with an Archangel without even using a Sacred Sword or Anointed Armor. If there had been more people like her around, then they wouldn't have even needed Archangels. If Juutilainen's story was true, one of the Archdemons was responsible for stealing the light from Kuroka's eyes.

The only one that comes to mind is Bifrons... The first time Chastille met Kuroka, she was spurred into action by Bifrons' scheming. Not that she could really fault her, seeing that Chastille was partially to blame for Raphael's situation. In any case, that was apparently the source of Kaltiainen and the older Juutilainen's reactions.

"Azazel's Staff is something Fairy Queen Titania once wielded in a battle against Archdemon Orias," Oberon added.

"What?!"

Chastille broke into a coughing fit.

"What's wrong?"

"N-Nothing. Please continue."

Orias? No way... Is this about Nephy's mother? Only a select few, including Zagan, were aware that the current Orias was none other than the Fairy Queen Titania.

Titania had thrown away her own name and took the place of Orias, meaning the weapon she wielded at the time was likely powerful enough to overthrow an Archdemon. It was said that Oberon once defeated an Archdemon, but if that was actually Titania's

accomplishment, then it somewhat made sense.

Chastille recalled her conversation with Zagan when he began investigating Azazel. At the time, he was under the impression that it was the name of a thirteenth Sacred Sword. In a sense, he may have been correct.

“An Archdemon is apparently after Azazel’s Staff,” Oberon continued. “We must recover it before it’s stolen. Please open the treasury for me.”

And this had everyone murmuring.

Archdemon... I hope it's not Zagan... In any case, it was already determined how Chastille would behave herself here.

“Lady Oberon. That would be a grave situation if it is true. Allow me to cooperate to the best of my abilities.”

“You have my thanks, Lady Chastille.”

Oberon nodded without any change in expression, but Chastille felt a strange sense of discomfort from that.

Huh? Something about that just now felt a little... She wracked her brain for the answer, but Valjakka spoke up before she could figure it out.

“It is indeed a dire situation, Lady Oberon. I’m not accusing you of anything, but is there a reason you believe that to be the case?”

A legendary Angelic Knight showed up out of nowhere and told them of an unbelievable incident. It would have been more odd not to doubt her at all.

“Hah!” Kaltiainen broke into a scornful laugh. “There’s no need to even ask. It’s Archdemon Zagan. Bet that bastard’s full of himself because he took Metatron.”

That itself was a prime example of a groundless assumption. Chastille was about to object, but Oberon shook her head before she said anything.

“No, our enemies are Archdemon Shere Khan and Bifrons.”

The Archangels were all astir at this information.

“Two... Archdemons?”

“I’m not aware of the details, but the two of them have put together a joint front.”

“Lady Oberon and I were investigating the treasury, and we ended up crossing blades with Shere Khan’s underlings. However, they managed to get away from us,” Ginias said as he gnashed his teeth. Then he paused, shook his head, and continued, “No, that’s not quite right. We were sent flying away.”

“We were teleported into the middle of the Katachnia wastelands by sorcery and were stranded there for three days,” Oberon claimed as she let out an unamused sigh.

“Three days? And you were at the treasury? Doesn’t that mean...?”

Kaltainen mumbled as he rose to his feet.

“Yes. I believe they’ve already infiltrated the treasury.”

The treasury had managed to keep sorcerers out for a thousand years, but now it was in an ever-so-fragile state.



“Haah. I’m done. I’m seriously done. What’s with this place?!”

A girl’s scream resounded throughout the labyrinth beneath Raziel’s cathedral. She looked to be around 15 years old. Her blonde hair went down over her right shoulder and was tied together into a little tuft at the end using a ribbon. Her small face was still somewhat childish, and her deep-blue eyes were blurred with tears.

And yet, she wore a casual outfit comprised of a breastplate with her navel exposed along with a skirt short enough that one could almost see her underwear. To top things off, she wore a belt that was ill-matched to her slender figure that also had a longsword dangling from it. This girl’s name was Dexia.

“Gaah! Seriously! What’s with that woman?! We would be in that stupid treasury already if not for her!”

She began flailing around and throwing a tantrum on the floor, and a blade stabbed into the ground right by her face.

“Wh-Wh-Wh-Wh-What are you doing, Aristella?!”

“Aristella determined that you would be better off dead, Dexia.”

“Why?!”

Dexia retreated while still sitting on her butt. Aristella’s eyes were serious.

“C-C-C-C-Calm down, Aristella! Don’t you think Master Shere Khan will grieve if we have a falling out?!”

“Aristella does not. Abandoning the mission is a serious crime. There’s no need to bother Master with it. Aristella will kill herself together with you.”

“I didn’t say anything about abandoning the mission, right?!”

The girl thrusting a blade at Dexia without any light left in her eyes, Aristella, was wearing much more modest clothing comprised of an extremely frilly shirt and skirt. And just like Dexia, she had an ill-matched belt wrapped around her waist. However, unlike Dexia, she had two vicious-looking scimitars dangling from her belt.

The two girls were peas in a pod. The color of their hair, their eyes, and all their facial features were identical. About the only difference between them aside from their clothes was the fact that Dexia’s hair was tied to the right, while Aristella’s was tied to the left.

“I’ll finish the mission, okay? But we’ve been wandering around this place for three days, right? I can whine about it just a little, right?”

When Dexia and Aristella had attempted to break into the treasury, they'd been thwarted by a team of two Angelic Knights. The woman didn't name herself, but the boy called himself Ginias. Aristella shook her head.

"It hasn't just been a little. You've been whining for three whole days. Aristella's spirit is at its limit."

Taking some time to think about it, this would probably explain why Aristella's eyes looked so empty. And having noticed this, Dexia twiddled her fingers together.

"Umm. Sorry. My bad. I'll do my best, so let's get out of this together, okay? It'll all be good if we finish the mission, right?"

Dexia sincerely apologized, and Aristella eventually sheathed her scimitar. Finally relaxing, she let out a small sigh and sat on the ground. It was clear that she was feeling down too, and Dexia shuffled up next to her.

"I wonder if Master Shere Khan has been fine without us for these three days."

"...Mm. We really need to get back. Aristella fears *that one* is dangerous."

She was referring to the Archdemon who had suddenly appeared one week ago. They were grateful that Shere Khan was saved, but the girls really couldn't trust the other Archdemon. It was perhaps to be expected of a sorcerer, but that one was different from their lord.

"How far away did that woman get sent?"

"The outskirts of the Katachnia Wastelands. Carriages rarely pass through there. It should buy us three days."

"Three days? So time's basically up now, huh?"

That was surely Aristella's source of irritation.

I can't really laugh at them when we're the ones who totally got stalled. Dexia mocked herself. Everything was going fine when Aristella used her sorcery to send the two Angelic Knights far, far away. But they ended up tripping over that woman's traps in the treasury.

Walls would swap positions with each other. There were classic traps like pitfalls and poison arrows. There were even malicious curses being fired around like one would find among the spirits of the deceased. It really made them wonder if they were underneath a church. It would have been much more convincing if someone had told them this was a sorcerer's den. And thanks to that, Dexia and Aristella had been stuck wandering around this labyrinth for three days.

"Oh yeah, I wonder if those Angelic Knights were brought in by that guy?"

Dexia cocked her head, and Aristella nodded.

“The traitors?”

“Yup. They were strangely friendly. I wonder if they’re double agents or something?”

The reason the two of them had been able to sneak into the treasury so easily was because they had helpers among the Angelic Knights. However, Aristella’s reaction put a damper on this.

“If so, Master will deal with them. It’s not something Aristella needs to worry about.”

“Well, even if there is a traitor, nothing gets solved by just eliminating them.”

The two girls were at their limits from tricking their brains into not needing food or sleep using sorcery. They could go a while longer by moving around less and taking turns resting, but having no water really was harsh. In terms of sorcery, teleportation was one that triggered tremendous exhaustion too. Aristella’s stamina was currently low enough that it would hinder her in battle. The fact that she was ready to resort to double suicide really showed how tired she was.

No way I can let that happen. We’re definitely going back to Master Shere Khan! And yet she spent all this time whining. Dexia certainly was in the wrong. She then pulled a scrap of paper from her pouch.

“It’s not like I’ve just been wandering around like a lost kid or anything. The map’s pretty much done.”

Dexia was a fairly rough girl, but she had been jotting down a precise map of the area by counting the number of steps they were taking. The map covered three floors. She was likely more familiar with the labyrinth than the church at this point.

“But we still haven’t found the all-important path to the treasury.”

“Yeah, about that. Is Azazel’s Staff really such a scary treasure that it needs to be sealed in this kinda maze?”

“Scary-wary.”

“...Aristella. Get some sleep. You’re going crazy.”

After having that pointed out to her, Aristella opened her eyes wide, as if she had just received a major shock.

“Dexia is making fun of Aristella... Aristella has no choice but to die now...”

“What do you take me for?”

Dexia glared back at her, but Aristella simply rolled over and put her head on Dexia’s lap.

“Ah, hey. Don’t just use my lap...”

By the time Dexia let out a sigh, Aristella was already asleep. She gently brushed the sleeping girl’s head and innocently smiled as she whispered to her.

“Let’s do our best and kill a whole lotta them, okay? Rare species. Angelic Knights. Sorcerers. Let’s kill them all and make Master Shere

Khan happy. Just like that time with Azazel. Okay? Aristella?"

"...Mm. Let's do our best and kill them all, Dexia."

Neither of them showed any hint of hesitation or guilt. These two sorcerers were so pure that it was almost pitiful.



The sun had set. It was somewhat too late to enjoy any sightseeing in the Holy City, so Zagan and Nephy decided to stay at an inn.

How did it end up like this?! Zagan and Nephy found a single large bed in their inn room. Just one bed. And yet, there were two pillows. The two of them had already had a meal and bath, so Zagan was currently dressed in a gown. Nephy, on the other hand, was wearing a faint white negligee and looked truly adorable. Her hair, which was usually tied up by a ribbon, was now let down. It gave her a different atmosphere from normal, which was rather nice.

Incidentally, Raphael got a separate room for himself, just like a proper attendant. Zagan told him to just spend his time in the Holy City however he wanted, so he would surely take care of himself.

In any case, Zagan did actually know the reason for the situation before him.

"Th-This manner of room... is used for... a honeymoon, was it?" Nephy said nervously.

They were currently in the Holy City's largest inn, the Jewel of Raziel. Raphael had made the reservations for them, and after Zagan and Nephy awkwardly referred to each other as honey and dear at the reception desk, the receptionist had simply noted, "So you're on your honeymoon, right?"

As such, the staff at the inn naturally treated them as a newly-wed couple, so it would be wrong to complain about their hospitality.

But! But come on! What do I even do in this situation?! Zagan timidly looked at Nephy.

"Th-This is... what Manuela told me about..."

Nephy was whispering to herself like she was resolving herself to face some long-awaited event.

I-Is it really okay...? Does this mean it's fine to go forward? Zagan gulped. There was nothing left to hesitate about... Actually, there was plenty to hesitate about. Zagan was a complete novice at love. He still blushed from the simple act of walking around hand in hand. He'd only ever kissed her that one time too. He only knew what to do in bed theoretically. To sum things up, he had no confidence that he could take the lead for nighttime activities.

Zagan vigorously shook his head.

Gaah! How pathetic! And you call yourself the man who will make Nephy happy, Zagan?! After firing himself up, he grabbed Nephy's

shoulders.

“N-Nephy!”

“Y-Yes?!”

Neither of them said another word. Zagan’s heart was beating like a hammer. He could tell this was the same for Nephy through her trembling shoulders. Her nightgown was thin, and he could feel the warmth of her skin through it. The area around her chest was ever-so-slightly transparent, making him even more nervous and somewhat sweaty.

Zagan peered into her azure eyes and could see his frozen face reflected right behind her snow-white eyelashes. He tried to fire himself up once more, but of all things, Nephy made the first move. She leaned in against Zagan’s chest and whispered so quietly that it felt like her voice would vanish.

N-Next is to take off... Wait, no. It’s too soon for that. Uhh, um... First is... lie down? Just as that thought passed his mind, he realized the two of them were still wearing slippers. Zagan kicked his off roughly into the corner, and then let one of his hands go to gently remove Nephy’s slippers one at a time.

Her exposed toes were stretched out with tension right to their tips, as if even her feet were embarrassed by the act. Zagan then wriggled his way to the center of the bed, lay his head on a pillow, and ended up in a position where Nephy was using his arm as a pillow.

“Hwah...”

A sound akin to both a surprised yelp and a pleasant sigh leaked from her lips.

Oh. Isn’t this how it’s supposed to end? Zagan was wracking his brain, seeing that he didn’t know what the “proper order” was. Nephy also seemed to be right at her limits. Her eyes were twirling about, and she was breathing roughly from her nose.

“...It smells like Master Zagan.”

“Huh? My smell?”

Nephy only just realized what it was she said when faced with Zagan’s bewilderment. Her entire face was bright red right to the very tips of her ears.

“N-No! That’s not! Um, I mean, it’s not wrong, but...”

“U-Uhh. What do I... smell like?”

He never really considered what his own body odor was like. Or rather, even if he sniffed himself, he wouldn’t be able to tell.

“Hwah. Th-Th-That’s... um, like... sweat?”

“Sorry. I didn’t notice.”

“Th-That’s not wh-what I mean. I don’t hate it!”

Both of them were in a complete fluster, and Nephy burst into

laughter.

“Somehow... this reminds me of when we first met.”

“Aah... Mm. Well, we did fumble around a lot back then.”

“We did. It was the same that night I told you about myself too.”

“When was that?”

“When I told you about mysticism. Even when I told you about what happened at the village, you simply accepted everything as if it wasn’t a big deal. It really made me happy.”

“Well, that’s because I was much more of a good-for-nothing than you were.”

It was actually far stranger that Nephy didn’t run away after hearing about him.

Nephy then rubbed her face against Zagan’s arm.

“That night... I planned to let you have a good sleep, just like this.”

“That’s exactly what you did. I don’t know how many years it had been since I’d had such a sound sleep.”

“I’m pleased that you say so.”

Zagan stroked Nephy’s white hair.

“You’ve learned to smile much better since those days.”

“W-Was I that curt before?”

She was surely aware of her stoic manner, so she raised her voice in a fluster.

“I wouldn’t say you were curt. That in itself was rather cute.”

“Hyu...”

Nephy’s bright red ears jiggled about, and she then began her counterattack.

“But I do believe you’re the one who has softened up considerably, Master Zagan?”

“Huh? Was I that frightening before?”

“I wouldn’t say you were frightening... Um, at the time, I couldn’t even guess the meaning behind your words... How do I put it...?”

The castle did, in fact, have corpses and torture devices scattered all over the place back then. Zagan was also aware that his conduct was somewhat misleading too. It was surely on Nephy’s mind back then.

Zagan apologetically scratched his cheek.

“Umm, sorry about that. I wasn’t able to honestly tell you that I loved you or that you were cute back then.”

“C-Cute?”

“Well, yeah. Every part of you is utterly cute. Back then, and now. The way your toes stretched out just now was cute too.”

“Why were you looking at that?!”

Nephy covered her face on the verge of tears.

That part of you is also what makes you unbearably cute, though...
However, if he continued to assault her with the word cute any more than this, she would probably pass out, so Zagan wisely kept his mouth shut.

“We sure have reminisced a lot today, haven’t we?”

“True... I mean, we haven’t been able to be alone like this ever since Foll came to us, right?”

Now that she mentions it, that’s true! Nephy surely wanted some time alone with him as well. So why hadn’t Zagan of all people noticed that until now? Such was the case, but Nephy buried her face into Zagan’s chest with a satisfied look.

“But I feel like it’s nice precisely because it’s only once in a while.”

“R-Really?”

“I mean, if it happened every day, it’d be so embarrassing, and I’d be so happy, I feel like I’d collapse.”

Zagan’s face cramped at secretly enjoying Nephy’s embarrassment. Then he began rubbing her back.

“Well, you may have a point there.”

It truly was half a year since they were completely alone together. It was fine to have her be as bashful as she wanted. And having reminisced about the past, both of them managed to relax a fair amount.

“Nephy...”

And now, it was finally time to take things to the next stage... but Zagan was left completely dumbstruck.

“Huh? Nephy?”

Nephy had fallen sound asleep with her face still buried in his chest.

Hnnngh! Why did you fall asleep right there?! It was perfectly understandable in a sense. He’d practically dragged her to the Holy City without explaining a thing. It was normal for exhaustion to pile up after spending the entire day being jolted around in a carriage.

So after getting her to relax, Nephy’s fatigue simply peaked out. It was like all the threads keeping her tense were cut loose all at once. And thinking back on that, Zagan let the strength out of his shoulders.

“...Oh well. This is fine.”

He got to see her in new clothes, they called each other honey and dear, they spoke with Oberon and that young knight, and they managed to wax nostalgic at night. Didn’t he get to see plenty of Nephy being cute and lovely?

Their trip to the Holy City was longer than a single evening too. He just had to show that he could do better tomorrow. And feeling somewhat satisfied, Zagan fell asleep.

Chapter III: The More Secret a Sightseeing Spot, the More Exciting

“Sorry Nephteros, I have a mission to do right now.”

Immediately following the meeting of the Archangels, Chastille returned to the waiting room where she talked to an elf with silver hair, golden eyes, and dark skin. One usually didn't sense it from her strong-willed expression, but when she kept quiet, she really did look exactly like Nephy. This was the high elf created by Archdemon Bifrons, Nephy's little sister, Nephteros.

A tall Angelic Knight named Richard stood just behind Chastille.

“I shall accompany you.”

“No, it's fine. Please stay by Nephteros' side. It seems it's not a terribly good situation for us.”

“What do you...”

“Bifrons, right?” Nephteros guessed before Chastille could reply. “I can feel this unpleasant prickling in my chest. That Archdemon is nearby, right?”

“...Yeah.”

It could be that her nature as a homunculus allowed her to sense Bifrons' existence even though she had left the Archdemon's side.

“Does that mean Bifrons broke through his sorcery...?”

Archdemon Bifrons had a pledge cast on them by Zagan which prevented them from appearing before Nephteros. Breaking the pledge would mean death. It wasn't worth risking, even for an Archdemon.

“That's not necessarily true. It seems Bifrons joined hands with Shere Khan. If their current goal is Shere Khan's priority, Bifrons may not be intending on appearing before you, Nephteros.”

“So shouldn't we stick together then? I should at least work as an insect repellent.”

“You can't. All the Archangels will be charging in together. In the worst case, I'll need your help out here. We can't take on too many risks.”

Chastille considered Nephteros a dear friend that she had to protect, but she also thought of her as an ally she could rely on. Chastille had made clear enemies within the church. And if they were to pull the rug out from underneath her feet, the only one she could rely on was Nephteros.

Our initial goal was to set up a counterplan against that, though...

Oberon's request was an unexpected situation.

And with no other choice, Nephteros nodded.

"...Alright. You sure are unpleasantly calm in this sort of situation. You should give me a bit more time to hesitate."

"Sorry. I'll make it up to you."

"I-I'm not telling you to make up for it!"

Nephteros shook her head, seeing that she wasn't really getting it, and a familiar laugh broke out from the shadow at Chastille's feet.

"Hehehe, you've got an idea about what the culprit is planning, right crybaby?"

"Don't call me crybaby, Barbatos."

Barbatos was obviously still hiding within Chastille's shadow during the meeting. He then let out an exasperated sigh from the shadows.

"Well... You deserve it this time. Even though you're in work mode and all, you were about to go right into a free-for-all slaughterfest if that brat didn't put a stop to it, right?"

"Ugh..."

With sweat on her brow, Chastille averted her eyes at having that pointed out to her. She couldn't make any excuses for messing up when Stella showed up.

"Huh? Did you do something again?"

"Don't you start too, Nephteros! I've actually been pushing my limits, you know?!"

"Isn't that the same as always? Come on, don't cry."

Nephteros hugged Chastille with familiar movements and began petting her head.

It's vexing, but this really soothes my heart... Chastille calmed down, and Barbatos started talking from the shadows once more.

"Let me tell you this now. That ass Zagan is in the Holy City."

"Zagan? Is he also after Azazel's Staff?"

"Dunno? He brought his bride along, so maybe he's actually just doing some sightseeing."

Chastille and Nephteros both shook their heads in astonishment.

"There's no way. Zagan wouldn't do something so haphazard, right?"

"That's right. This is Big Bro we're talking about. He probably anticipated Bifrons' move."

"...Don't you guys think a little too highly of that asshole?"

Barbatos was actually right, but nobody believed him. This could be considered inevitable taking into account what he usually went around spouting.

"Whatever. Anyways, we gotta catch the culprit now, or we'll run outta chances, right?"

As the leader of the Unification Faction, Chastille was isolated in the church. She was even cut off from receiving information.

“The Unification Faction said that they have the cardinals handled. Which means the culprit should be one of the Archangels...”

The moment she began doubting them, frankly, they all looked suspicious.

The most suspicious is Lord Kaltainen, but... He did call her a traitor straight to her face earlier. It would have been stranger not to suspect him. But he was so blunt about it that it made him less suspicious in a sense. Chastille pondered over it for a while longer, when a laugh came from her shadow once more.

“Ain’t there just one really suspicious guy?”

“...! Really?”

“You really should notice this crap... It’s that guy, the — Oops.”

Just as Barbatos was about to say something, he suddenly vanished. Chastille noticed what was going on just one step later.

Someone’s coming. She regained her composure and began talking to Richard.

“In any case, that’s how it is. Please protect Nephteros.”

“Understood.”

“I’m not so weak that I need protecting though?”

The two of them immediately figured it out and played along. And just then, a knock came from the door to the room.

“Chastille, do you have a minute?”

The one to enter the room was Valjakka. Immediately after he entered, he stared in wonder at Nephteros.

“Lord Valjakka. What do you need?”

“O-Oh... Our opponent is an Archdemon. It’s been decided that we’ll be breaching the treasury in teams of two. Would you like to pair up with me? That’s what I came to ask, but...”

Elves were considered sacred within the church, and Valjakka’s gaze was glued to Nephteros.

“Allow me to introduce you. This is my aide Richard, and my personal friend Nephteros. And this is Lord Valjakka. He’s one of the Archangels.”

Richard straightened himself up and situated himself, while Nephteros lightly greeted him with a nod. It was actually Valjakka who bowed down reverently.

“How surprising. I never thought you would gain the assistance of an elf. Perhaps my meddling was unnecessary.”

Nephteros knit her brows at that statement.

“Are you Chastille’s friend?”

“Her brother was my adjutant, you see, so I consider Chastille a little sister... though she’s a splendid Archangel now, so I suppose I

can't keep treating her like a child forever."

"Hmm, is that so?"

Chastille could see sympathy in Nephteros' gaze and shrugged her shoulders.

"Then I'll leave Chastille to you. She can be quite clumsy at the critical stage, after all."

"Nephteros!"

"I'm counting on you. It'll be problematic if she's gone."

Chastille faltered at her perfectly honest statement.

"I promise I won't allow any harm to come to her. Now then, let's go Chastille. The other knights have already charged in."

Valjakka urged her on, and Chastille put her hand to her sword.

"I'll be back soon. Don't you worry and wait right here."

"Right. Be safe."

Nephteros nodded, and Chastille left the waiting room. And just as she did, she remembered something and looked over to Richard.

"...Um, Richard. You do your best, too."

"...Yes. I'll put in some effort."

Despite the two of them being alone during the entire meeting, it didn't look like he'd managed to make any progress in getting closer to her at all.



On the same evening, Foll plopped herself down on the throne while engrossed in thought.

I'm happy Zagan went to play for his own sake. But... why at this time? The Zagan that Foll knew was quite the klutz when it came to Nephy. However, he wasn't someone who would stupidly leave his defenses undermanned in the middle of preparing to deal with an Archdemon.

Meaning there was something that Zagan had to do himself that was worth sacrificing his defenses for.

But what is it? She couldn't really do anything by worrying about it, but it was still on her mind. And unable to find an answer, Foll leaned back in the throne. The back support was too far away, however, and she ended up tumbling backwards. As she looked up, she found golden eyes looking down at her.

"Teehee, that's quite the grim expression you have there." It was Alshiera. She was leaning over Foll's face while sitting on the throne's armrest. "Are you dissatisfied with watching the house?"

"Not really."

She wasn't dissatisfied, but she also wasn't satisfied. And seeing through her complex state of mind, Alshiera brushed Foll's head.

"Now then, where did the Silver-Eyed King's objective take him

this time, I wonder?"

She was right on the mark, but Foll was already used to this, so she simply nodded back before speaking.

"He didn't sound troubled, but it also sounded like he was in a rush. Did something happen?"

"How about going to investigate?"

"...I can't. I don't want to get in Zagan's way."

He was finally on a trip all alone with Nephy. If she went to meet them, it would be the same as always. She loved the time she spent with them, but she believed it was better if they made some progress.

Alshiera let out an amused laugh.

"Even if you do not chase after the Silver-Eyed King, you can investigate what he saw."

"...By going to see Orias?"

Zagan was supposed to have visited Orias the other day. Meaning something happened had there, or he'd found something there. That's why he'd suddenly said he was going to the Holy City. It tickled her curiosity, but Foll shook her head nonetheless.

"I can't. I need to protect you."

The reason Foll was able to deliver a blow to Bifrons was because she was in Zagan's domain. She didn't believe it would be possible if she were to leave. And knowing that full well, Alshiera nodded.

"That's exactly why. There's no harm in going if I'm with you."

Apparently, she was offering to take Foll there.

Foll wavered but shook her head.

"...As thanks? Protecting you was something I did on my own. I don't need it."

"Not as thanks, but as a reward. Doesn't a good child doing her best deserve a reward?"

There was something dodgy about the way she said "reward" that reminded Foll of Gremory, but she had no reason to refuse either.

Is it okay to just accept this for doing my best in a suitable way for my age? She wasn't overreaching herself, so it was surely fine to accept this much. And after she pondered over it for a whole minute, she nodded back.

"Got it. Then let's go."

"Heehee, what a good girl."

Seeing Alshiera somewhat pleased about this, Foll felt like she figured it out.

"You were also worried?"

"Did you think I wasn't?" Alshiera got down from the armrest and held her hand out to her. "Shall we?"

"...Right now?"

It was already late at night. This was normally Foll's bedtime. And

yet the vampire smiled at her like a mischievous brat.

“Night is my time to shine.”

Foll really was tired, but she also felt like she wouldn't be able to sleep while this was on her mind. She hesitated but ended up taking Alshiera's hand.

“Okay, let's go.”

What's this feeling? The warmth she felt from Alshiera was similar to what she felt from Zagan and Nephy, but it was somehow different. It wasn't the same as the kindness she received from Gremory or Raphael either. But it still wasn't unpleasant...

Friendship... That single word came to mind. On one hand, there was the daughter of a dragon who could compare to an Archdemon. On the other, there was an ancient vampire who even Zagan said he could not defeat.

Such a pair were now standing side by side, but they didn't look like anything more than two little girls going off to play.

“Keehee, what wonderful love power! What's with this strong desire that makes me want to adopt them?! It hides an infinite well of love power within it!”

“Gremory, you coming?”

The granny was once more writhing about in happiness in front of the throne room door.





Foll, Alshiera, and Gremory arrived at Orias' base around the time dawn was breaking. Gremory was in the form of a young girl, perhaps to match up with the other two.

Gremory may have come along as an escort in her own little way... About 90 percent of it was just her going along with her desires, but Foll believed that the remaining 10 percent was maybe to protect the two of them. And 10 percent was actually pretty big for this granny, who usually only acted on instinct.

With Orias' base in sight, Alshiera cocked her head.

"Is this where an Archdemon lives?"

They were currently far to the north of Kianoides, deep within a forest. There were no human habitats within walkable distance, and even hunters were said not to tread this far. There were obviously no girls anywhere nearby too, which is why Gremory staked her life on escaping this secluded region.

This was even further from Zagan's castle than the Holy City of Raziel, and it would have taken about a week by carriage to arrive. And yet the three of them got there in just a few hours.

It's not as good as the handyman, but that was still teleportation. Zagan had prepared devices capable of activating teleportation sorcery. It couldn't go anywhere he wanted like Barbatos, but it apparently linked together fixed locations that Zagan had decided on. There was a need to install a magic circle at the destination, so it required traveling there once beforehand. Still, this was very high-level sorcery.

Barbatos was actually the strange one for being able to link together any shadow of any person once he was cognizant of them. He truly possessed prodigious talent as a sorcerer. There likely wasn't even an Archdemon who could surpass him at teleportation.

The handyman was probably number one before Zagan became an Archdemon. Gremory and Kimaris were also sorcerers who represented their respective fields of sorcery, but when it simply came to who could use the most advanced sorcery, Barbatos was likely in the lead. Which would put Foll as last among all the candidates. At the time, she only excelled at using dragon sorcery, and nothing else.

Would I be able to beat the handyman now? Foll tried simulating a fight with Barbatos in her mind. If it was a head-on fight, she could probably win. In the worst case, she could even eat the shadows and devour him.

But I don't think I'd have a chance if he was an enemy... When walking alone at night, or sleeping, or chatting with someone close to

her, there were countless occasions where Barbatos could easily slip in and stab her with a knife. There was no need for anything more complex. It was impossible to keep one's guard up at all times, after all.

There were, of course, ways of sealing teleportation. However, it didn't seem like it would work against Barbatos. He was a monster who could easily hijack Zagan's magic circle. It would be like trying to block a sword with a paper shield.

Zagan was able to deal with him because his physical reinforcement could withstand a surprise stabbing, and any further sorcery would just be devoured by him.

As Foll observed the mechanism behind the teleportation, she answered Alshiera's puzzled question.

"This is where I came last time..."

"Mm. It seems she's out," Gremory said, as she looked up at the building in relief.

"So, Zagan didn't meet Orias?"

"Who knows? It's also possible she left after they met... Wait, that's not right."

Gremory searched the ground. There were several footprints there. Someone had come and was walking in circles after not being able to enter right away.

Zagan and Raphael noticed she wasn't home and wondered whether they should let themselves in. The granny was actually quite talented to be able to find such tracks.

"I thought Archdemons tended to live in big castles," Alshiera commented with mixed feelings.

"My teacher is quite the misanthrope. She said this was just about right for her."

Orias' base was quite different from the other Archdemons' bases. It was nothing more than a small hut. Apparently, she made use of a subspace created with sorcery to store her vast accumulation of bookshelves which contained her wisdom. The hut itself was just big enough for a single person to live in. Just having two or three guests would make it rather cramped.

Gremory apparently got a lump on her head while being forced to sit on her knees here once. The building itself was covered in moss and being assimilated into the surrounding trees. It truly looked like an elf's hiding place.

Such was Orias' refuge, but right now nobody was home. That's probably why Gremory had actually come along.

"Should we go in?"

Foll gave up on observing the teleportation mechanism and stood back up.

“There’s no meaning to coming here if we don’t,” Alshiera said with a nod.

“Keeheehee, let’s go expose my teacher’s deepest secrets.”

“...So why are you hiding behind me?”

Even though she knew nobody was here, Gremory was unable to suppress her body rejecting the act, so she glued herself to Alshiera’s back.

“We’re coming in granny.”

Foll put her hand to the door. There was neither a keyhole nor a lock. It was the type to have a bolt blocking it on the other side. Foll pushed lightly on the door, and it creaked open without any resistance.

It was dimly lit inside despite being early in the morning, and a cold breeze flowed out. The damp smell of trees and soil tickled her nose. It was the middle of winter, but there was no smell of oil or ash inside from being warmed up. It seemed that she’d been out for more than just a few days.

The dim lighting didn’t make any difference from the brightly lit outdoors to a dragon’s eyes. Foll took a look around the room. The table that was leaning against the wall the last time she came was now sitting in the center of the room. There were three long and narrow shelves on the walls. Two of them were filled with jars of medicine, while the third had miscellaneous parchments and grimoires strewn across it.

There were multiple large parchments on the table, as well as smaller ones with memos written on them. It looked like Orias was investigating something, and likely didn’t have the leisure to clean up when she’d left the place.

“It doesn’t look like there was a fight.”

“Indeed. The fireplace was taken care of properly too.”

Alshiera pointed at the fireplace. New firewood was placed inside, and the ashes were completely cleaned out. Foll took a step into the hut, onto the thin flooring. Dust had started to accumulate, but there wasn’t enough to leave behind footprints. Even as she passed her finger over the table, there wasn’t any dirt to be found. Upon noticing that, Foll leaned over the table and looked at one of the small memos.

“It was all tidy the last time I came. Why is it all messy when it doesn’t seem like she was in a rush?”

“I mean, my teacher is actually quite sloppy when it comes to... Eep?!”

Gremory suddenly screamed while in the middle of trying to expose her teacher’s habits.

“What’s wrong?”

“I just felt like I was about to be killed...”

Foll and Alshiera cocked their heads, but Gremory simply continued to tremble violently and didn't say anything more. So Alshiera turned her attention back to the room.

"It seems she's been out for about a week."

"A week? So since Alshiere Imera?"

"Seems so."

Gremory looked somewhat worried about this fact.

"I don't think it's possible when it comes to my teacher... But it does worry me."

Alshiere Imera was accompanied by the second advent of the rare species hunt. And elves were *the* prime example of a rare species. Gremory's anxieties stood to reason. But Alshiera shook her head.

"I don't think he had the leisure to meddle this far out. There are no traces of a scuffle either. If he was foolish enough to take on two or three Archdemons at the same time, he would've died five years ago anyway."

Foll nodded in agreement. Even wounded as she was, Alshiera was a threat on par with an Archdemon. The fact that she ran away into Zagan's territory meant Shere Khan was basically taking on two Archdemons at the same time. There were better ways of planning suicide than taking on even more Archdemons than that.

So what happened? Foll clambered onto a chair and looked through the memos on the table.

"...I can't read it."

It appeared to be written in some sort of Elvish. Zagan was proficient in it, but Foll couldn't read it at all. So in her stead, Gremory hopped up onto another chair to take a look.

"Let's see... Oh, this is too much for me too. Most of it's in Celestian."

"Celestian...?"

Orias was a high elf. She was likely the foremost expert on the language, far beyond both Nephteros and Bifrons.

"They're drawings of the Sigils of the Archdemons, so maybe it's related to that," Gremory added.

There were thirteen little parchments. The one in the center was a Sigil that Foll recognized.

And lastly, Alshiera climbed up onto a chair and rudely plopped herself down onto the table.

"Heart... right hand... oh my, how surprising. Was she actually analyzing the Sigils of the Archdemon?"

Alshiera smoothly read the memos that Gremory had given up on.

"You can read them?"

"Well, just a little."

"What do they say?"

After Foll asked, Alshiera plainly grimaced.

"I don't really want to explain."

"You said I could have a reward."

Foll pleaded with her, and Alshiera sighed in resignation.

"...You're unexpectedly good at begging."

"Keehee, well, of course... I've carefully trained her, you know?"

"...Foll, you should choose the people you associate with better."

"I'll take that as a compliment!"

Gremory warded off Alshiera's sigh with an iron-hearted will. And Foll came to fully realize that this granny was a top-notch sorcerer.

Alshiera picked up the small parchments and began lining them up in order.

"This is the heart. It's the Silver-Eyed King's Sigil. This one's the lungs. So it's little Andre's Sigil."

Both Foll and Gremory looked up upon hearing an unexpected name.

"Little Andre?"

"It can't be... Do you mean Head Archdemon Andrealphus?"

Alshiera nodded like it wasn't a big deal.

"I think it was about two hundred years ago? He came to Liucaon to play. He was a bit of a rascal at the time, so I wonder if he's calmed down by now."

"Two hundred years..."

Foll and Gremory both remembered hearing that before.

"Angelic Confession Zachariel. It's been two hundred years since this has been used in this world. Even Raphael wasn't able to reach this stage. This is the final form of the Sacred Sword."

That was what Andrealphus said when he'd wielded both a Sacred Sword and the power of an Archdemon to drive Zagan into a corner. Zagan said that if Andrealphus had planned on killing him from the start, he would have been dead already.

And that meant the Archdemon had challenged Alshiera two hundred years ago. Where, judging by the way she worded it, he'd been defeated handily. Foll and Gremory were at a loss for words, while Alshiera continued lining up the parchments.

"This is the left hand. Archdemon Naberius I think. This is the eyes... Bifrons? Ah, the child the Silver-Eyed King hates. And this one..." Alshiera's voice shook with both irritation and grief.

"Memories... the Tiger King Shere Khan."

Alshiera narrowed her gaze.

"I see. I have a read on the mechanism here now."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know how much the Archdemons themselves are aware of it, but once they've been entrusted with a Sigil, they're unable to

escape its influence. The Silver-Eyed King may have realized this instinctively. That's why he keeps that power at such an extreme distance from himself. However..."

She gently brushed the parchment in the middle, likely the one representing Zagan's Sigil.

"The heart is the source of mana. Its role is 'to provide.'"

Foll likely wasn't the only one who felt uneasy upon hearing those words.

Zagan liberally grants power to others as a reward. This could surely also be attributed to his personality, but it may have been that he was already under the influence of the Sigil.

"His refusal to offer such 'provisions' is practically nonexistent. When he interrupted the Sigil's power with little Andre, all he halted was the power from the heart."

She then smiled as if this were inevitable.

"...I'd like the Silver-Eyed King to face and understand the Sigil just a little more, though."

She was speaking of the Sigil like an old friend.

"What does that mean?" Foll asked as she cocked her head.

"...I've said a little too much. You want to know about Shere Khan's Sigil, right?"

Apparently, she would only tell Foll about one or the other. She wasn't going to answer as many questions as Foll wanted even if it was a reward. As such, Foll reluctantly nodded.

"First, is this."

Alshiera pointed at the two small parchments lined up at the top. The symbols of those two Sigils appeared to be different from the others.

"It's possible the 'eyes' and 'memories' have joined hands."

"Bifrons... and Shere Khan?"

"This may also be a result of the Sigils being drawn together."

Foll still didn't understand, but Gremory clapped her hands together.

"By 'memories,' do you mean the brain?"

"Is that different?"

"Mmm... The part of the brain which governs the memories sits right next to the optic nerve... that's why Lady Kuroka's treatment is quite difficult."

That was the first Foll had heard about it, but apparently, that was how the brain worked.

The contents of the head are outside my field. I don't get it at all.

"Let's get back on track..." Alshiera cleared her throat with a cough, then said, "Writing it down as memories is perhaps an error by the writer. But it may be accurate as a result..." For whatever reason,

she trailed off and stopped talking.

Is it hard to say? No... she probably doesn't want to say it. Gremory also seemed to have sensed this. She simply kept silent while looking at Alshiera without urging her on. And after eventually giving in, Alshiera finally continued.

"The seal of the 'memories of the Archdemon' is literally the 'memories of the first Archdemon'... Shere Khan may possess the truth of what happened a thousand years ago."

"A thousand years ago...? What happened?"

But Alshiera shook her head.

"I can't say."

It didn't appear to be out of stubbornness or selfishness. Foll could sense there was some sort of reason she couldn't speak of it.

"I can understand the reason for Shere Khan's actions if he's inherited the memories of the Archdemon. It's truly foolish and absurd though."

"The reason behind the rare species hunt?" Foll asked to confirm, and Alshiera nodded sadly.

"Yes. He may be trying to save the world, so to speak."

Foll and Gremory were both left staring wide-eyed at the completely unexpected answer.

"Save the world? By killing all rare species?"

"Yes. It truly is foolish. Even though he can't become 'that thing' precisely because it's just the memories."

"What do you mean?"

"In a manner of speaking, the memories are like the contents written in a book. You can't become the author just by possessing the book, right?"

"I don't really get it. Is it like he's imagining that he's become the author?" Foll asked, and Alshiera gently brushed her head.

"You catch on quickly."

It didn't feel bad, but Foll was still wondering what exactly was hidden within the Archdemon's memories, so she tried to take a step forward.

"I don't get it. What did Shere Khan see?"

"...He likely saw a certain man's unnatural death. The man he tried to save, but couldn't. And then..." Alshiera trailed off, gripped her chest tightly, then said, "The sight of 'me' dying at that time."

She showed neither regret nor anger. She simply smiled vacantly.

"If only I had more power... Anybody who lived at that time thought the same. That's why they desperately rebelled, fought, struggled, fell, and rose again. And yet..."

What exactly did she see with that tiny body of hers? She cradled her slender shoulders as she bit on her lips in grief. The dreadful

vampire looked like little more than a young girl who wanted to cry but couldn't. And so Foll climbed up onto the table next to her and hugged her.

"...It's okay. It's okay now."

She didn't know why she did it, but Foll brushed Alshiera's head. She could tell that the vampire's body relaxed completely.

"Heehee, you can't oppose your blood I see."

"Huh...?"

"A long time ago, your father said the same thing to me."

"Father...?"

She surely wasn't referring to Zagan but Wise Dragon Orobas, the legendary dragon who lived during the age of legends. It wouldn't be strange for Alshiera to know him, having lived for a thousand years.

She seemed to have calmed down completely. And after Foll let her go, she continued in a composed tone.

"We've gone off track. Shere Khan saw me die. And he knows that I still yet live."

"When you became one of the Night Clan?"

It was common knowledge among sorcerers that many sorcerers became members of the Night Clan while trying to attain immortality. But Alshiera shook her head.

"I became one for an entirely different reason. If not for that..."

She was unable to say any more. She then touched her abdomen, as if trying to explain with that motion instead.

Does her wound hurt...? No, that's not it... That wasn't where her wound was. Foll knew what that gesture meant. That was why she pretended not to notice and asked a different question.

"So you died once before becoming one?"

That explained why Alshiera Imera was Alshiera's birthday and was celebrated by the church as a holy day.

"A person can rise from the grave while remaining a person," Alshiera answered with a nod... "And Shere Khan came to know of this. It's possible to regain a life that had been lost. That can also be interpreted as the possibility to free people from death. Is it not something worth accomplishing even if the world must be destroyed?"

If people were truly freed from death, the world would become a paradise.

But... would that really bring happiness? Even Alshiera, who could be said to be close to immortal, always looked to be carrying anguish with her. And above all else, Alshiera herself didn't accept it. Foll didn't believe a better world awaited beyond that dream.

"Is Shere Khan trying to revive someone? And if so, who?"

"That I do not know. It may be someone personally related to Shere Khan himself, or perhaps someone from a thousand years ago.

Or maybe even... No, he wouldn't be *that* much of a fool."

Alshiera then pulled the Seraph Hunters out from underneath her skirt.

"Apparently, my dear brother failed to finish him off. But there should never have been a need to go as far as using the Seraph Hunters. Shere Khan should have died at that time too."

That should have been an astonishing revelation, but Foll's attention was attracted by something else.

Brother...? The one who defeated Shere Khan was supposed to be Zagan's friend Marc. Meaning... What do I do? Should I tell Zagan? Is it better to keep quiet?

Zagan had complex feelings towards Alshiera as it was. If he knew that she was perhaps someone even closer to him, he would surely agonize over it. However, Foll felt it wasn't something she could just put off either.

Alshiera continued, not making it clear whether or not she knew of Foll's dilemma.

"I do wonder if Shere Khan is truly 'Shere Khan' himself. He may just be something else that's under the impression that he is."

"Something... else...?"

Foll's gaze was attracted to the parchments lined up on the table. The thought of what was sealed by the Sigils of the Archdemon sent a shiver down her spine.

Alshiera then shook her head, having come back to her senses.

"Oh my? Now that I think of it, the other one here has been awfully quiet."

She looked at Gremory, and Foll shook her head as if this wasn't all that big a deal.

"It's the same as always. Don't worry about her."

"...Why has she fallen to the ground covered in her own blood?"

Gremory likely left behind the words, "Nice... lover power..." while spurting blood with a satisfied expression when Foll hugged Alshiera earlier. Gremory's eccentricity seemed to be even beyond the understanding of someone of Alshiera's level.

This was par for the course for Foll though, so she simply returned her attention to the table. There were other parchments than just the ones detailing the Sigils. And noticing her gaze, Alshiera began reading those aloud too.

"These appear to be deconstructed Sigils. Oh my, and this one's written in Elvish," Alshiera murmured. Then, after passing her eyes over it, she knit her brows and asked, "Hmm...? What's this about?"

"What?"

"It's written here that she went to look for Azazel's Staff."

It was precisely the name Zagan was investigating.

Orias went searching for that and vanished. Meaning Zagan is looking for her? Raphael was with him as well. He may have been the one who'd arrived at the idea of the Holy City. It wasn't clear whether Zagan's objective was Orias or the staff, maybe even both. But Alshiera's reaction was peculiar. The vampire sat there with her arms folded and cocked her head.

"Staff...? What does she mean by staff? Was there such a thing...?"

"Is it something you can talk about?"

Alshiera was apparently unable to speak of anything related to Azazel. Foll asked to see if it was something that would be bad for her to mention, but it turned out that Alshiera simply nodded with a perplexed look.

"If you want me to talk about something I have no knowledge of, then sure."

"Is it strange for it to exist?"

"It's baffling that I would know absolutely nothing about it. Does it really exist, I wonder...?" And after pondering over it for a while...

"Oh. Huh? Could it be *that*...? Really? That thing...?"

"Did you remember something...?"

"Rather than remember... You could say I have a clue as to what it is... But I don't know whether it should be classified as a staff or not." She then let out a deep sigh. "Well, if the Silver-Eyed King went to the Holy City, it means it's been enshrined in the church as a relic. How ostentatious. Well, my dear brother has always been like that I suppose."

Foll grimaced upon hearing something else she couldn't let pass.

Is Alshiera's brother from the church? This meant that the clue to the person Zagan was looking for was also in the church.

Alshiera then hopped off the table, seemingly losing interest.

"Well, we know why the Silver-Eyed King has gone on a little trip now."

"Is it all right?"

"It certainly would be troublesome if Shere Khan were to usurp control of that thing, but it should be fine. The child who left behind this note seems to know the true nature of the 'staff' anyways."

The reason she left behind all these memos on the table was likely to serve as a message to a visitor. Meaning it was for Zagan. The way she completely cleaned up the fireplace gave off the feeling that she wanted him to know he didn't need to worry about chasing after her. So for Zagan to take chase to the Holy City anyway, there had to be a reason for him to hurry.

Maybe something to do with Kuroka's treatment? Or perhaps it was necessary for Nephy so that she could perform the treatment. In any case, it was just like Zagan either way, and Foll was now fully

convinced.

"Now then, let's go back. I would like to relax and have some wine."

"Raphael will get angry, so you can't."

"Oh my, is Kianoides not right near the castle? The day is just starting, so we can stop by on our way back."

"You're a bad girl," Foll said with a sigh.

"Your shoulders will get stiff from being too much of a good girl."

And dragging Gremory along the ground, the three little girls headed home.



"Hmm, what are these beads?"

"It seems to be called *tapioca*. This is the first time I've seen the real thing."

"Is it some sort of egg?"

"No, it's apparently some species of potato that's been treated in some way..."

Zagan and Nephy had been sound asleep with her sleeping on his arm right until morning. And although they were far too embarrassed to look each other in the eye after that, the awkwardness in the air had vanished the moment they were brought a snack. The two of them had changed out of their sleepwear and were now fully prepared to do some sightseeing.

They were both downright perplexed with serious expressions, having been presented with some form of dessert they had never seen before. It was something they called tapioca juice. It was apparently a tremendously popular drink in the Holy City, and there were even those who had journeyed here just to have some.

"Judging from the straw, do we sip the drink through it?"

Two drinks in luxurious-looking glasses sat on the table before them. The liquid itself seemed to be a mix of sweet cocoa and milk. It was clear from the straw that it was meant to be enjoyed by sipping on it. And yet, there were several bean-like beads sitting at the bottom of the drink.

Is it meant to serve the same purpose as ice? Or can they be eaten?

Nephy normally had the answers regarding such matters, but she also didn't know about this drink. It was an unknown quantity to both of them.

Zagan took another look at the straw. It was just thick enough for the black beads to fit through. It was over twice the thickness of a regular straw. It would be trivial with the lung capacity of a sorcerer to suck them up. However, did the shop prepare this under the assumption that their customers were sorcerers?

He tried giving the beads a poke with the straw.

“Hmm...? It’s unexpectedly squishy.”

“Yes. It’s somehow quite cute too.”

“Cute...? I see. This can be called cute, huh?”

“Um, auugh...”

Zagan nodded along with Nephy’s unexpected sensibilities, leading the point of her ears to turn red.

“Nothing will come out of staring at it. Shall we try some?”

“Should I have a taste first?”

“No. What’ll we do if it happens to be dangerous? I’ll investigate it first.”

Zagan was dead serious, having come to some kind of outrageous hypothesis on the dangers tapioca juice could possibly pose. He put his lips on the straw and timidly tried sucking through it. The liquid rose through the straw, and the sweet taste of cocoa milk spread throughout his mouth.

Hmm. The juice isn’t bad. I feel like Nephy will like this too. However, the problem was the solid objects in the drink known as tapioca. Zagan didn’t know what they were there for, so he tried moving his straw over one and sucking through the straw.

“Oh?”

The bead unexpectedly crawled up the straw with ease and fell into his mouth.

Hmm...? It doesn’t taste like anything. Zagan recalled the first time he’d eaten a cherry tomato. It had taken him several minutes at the time to arrive at the answer of biting down, at which point he was left with a sadly lukewarm feeling. As such, Zagan immediately resolved to bite down so as to not repeat such folly.

“Ah...! Hmm, it’s rather sweet.”

“It’s sweet?”

“Mmm... I think the taste of the juice has soaked into them. It’s quite sweet. Also, the surface seems like jelly, but the interior has a consistency like marrow.”

The lumpy sensations weren’t bad at all. And after coming to an understanding and nodding, Nephy took her own straw.

“Then I will also try some.”

She brought her pink lips to the straw and the cocoa-colored liquid crawled up the transparent tube. Her tense expression lightened up completely like a blooming flower.

“Oh! How sweet.”

“Right?”

“Yes... Hm? Huh?”



Nephy's relaxed expression stiffened up with bewilderment. Zagan was about to ask her what happened but then remembered what he had experienced himself. Taking a closer look, there was not just one but two beads halfway up the straw. They appeared to be stuck, and she wasn't able to suck them up because of that.

She might have been panicking because Zagan was watching her. Nephy's pointy ears stiffened up, and the beads in her straw remained where they were. However, this was dangerously cute to Zagan, and he was near his limit of wanting to hug her and rub his cheek against hers.

Mm. Let's keep a record of this with Memorandum later. This was the sorcery he created with Gremory and Barbatos to store memories on a medium like paper. He really was glad they had managed to complete it without any difficulties.

"Ugh...!"

Nephy's efforts eventually bore fruit, and the jammed beads shot up the straw. And just like Zagan, she rolled them around on her tongue before biting into them full force.

"Ah...! What a mysterious sensation."

"Mmm... Shall we order it again after we go out to town?"

"It's caught your fancy I see."

"Maybe so. I'd like Foll and the others to try this too."

Actually, his desire to see Nephy troubled at trying to drink it was stronger than that, but he glossed over it skillfully.

Nephy squinted and took a closer look at the tapioca.

"...Is it possible to make myself, I wonder? The raw materials do seem rather special though."

"Hmm. It wouldn't be a bad idea for us to look into opening a trade route."

"A trade route?"

"Yeah. It's possible to get sorcerer-made goods like paper, perfume, silk and even tools made for sorcery. We may be able to acquire these at a low cost."

If he opened a trade route, it would be simple to acquire goods from elsewhere. However, the church would have their eyes on him if he overdid it, so they could end up fabricating an excuse to suppress his trade.

And yet they use sorcerer-made goods like paper and pens themselves. Well, as long as they were sufficiently antagonistic in public, it was an adequately lucrative market for them. That was why there were plenty of sorcerers who used this as a source of money. Zagan decided to see if any of his subordinates at the castle were familiar with this once he got back.

Unfortunately, there was nobody present to stop the Archdemon from wanting to open a trade route to his castle just to acquire tapioca. And as Zagan pondered over how to accomplish this, Nephy let out a curious laugh.

“You seem to be having fun, Master Zagan.”

“Starting something new is fun. Well, we’ll only get started once Chastille’s problem has been resolved though.”

“By that, do you mean about how Chastille is isolated in the church?”

It was natural for Nephy to be worried about her good friend.

“Yeah,” Zagan replied with a nod. “That said, I sent Barbatos along with her. It’ll surely get settled soon.”

“Lord Barbatos is rather serious when it comes to Chastille, isn’t he?”

“That’s true, but when it comes to eavesdropping, he’s second to none. It’s impossible to get away from him without the protection of an Archdemon.”

Even if he had to brave the danger of exposing himself each time, the moment he confirmed someone by sight, he could connect to their shadow. It was like being under watch even when in the bath or using the latrine. So when one was unable to use sorcery, like the people of the church, it was almost pitiful.

As such, Nephy inevitably strained a smile.

“I feel a little sorry for them, but it’s their fault for messing with Chastille.”

She was one to be firm about her statements when it came to it.

Actually, I’m sure Nephy is annoyed by it as well... One could even say that she looked cheerful. Taking a closer look, he could even spot a vein popping from her forehead. The fact that she could properly show her anger was also a major point of growth from when he first met her. And watching over her with a wry smile, he opened a map of the Holy City.

“Now then, where shall we start looking around?”

As he brought this up, Nephy began twiddling her fingers together in a troubled manner.

“Um, Master Zagan. Are you not searching for somebody? How about walking about while focusing on that?”

“Huh? Oh, that’s fine now. We met that woman named Oberon yesterday, right?”

“Yes.”

“We can just leave it to her. Let’s enjoy the Holy City since we’ve come all this way.”

“Is that so...?”

Nephy didn’t look fully convinced, so Zagan simply smiled.

“Well, it’s not like I don’t have any other goals.”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah. It seems there’s a treasure called Azazel’s Staff stored in the church. I want to confirm what it is. If possible, I’d like to acquire it too.”

“So should we head to the church first?”

Nephy clapped her hands like it was a great idea, but Zagan shook his head.

“No, it’s the church’s treasure. If I went to go steal it, we’d end up starting a war with the Holy City.”

“...Oh, right. That’s true.”

“Well, if we could sneak in skillfully, would you like to try taking a look? The treasure room of the church headquarters really isn’t something we need to pay respect to. It could serve as a good sightseeing spot.”

“Yes, I’m also quite interested.”

“I see. Then let’s put all the people of the church to sleep with sorcery and—”

“Master Zagan. We can just go sightseeing normally.”

Zagan began muttering about a grand plan to break into the church in a completely serious tone, and just then...

“What...?” Zagan and Nephy both looked up and said that at the same time. They were on the top floor of the inn. The only thing above them was the roof, but they sensed a strange flow of mana... or rather, a strange distortion.

Seems like something is about to fall onto the table. They still had tapioca juice left. Zagan grabbed the table to move it, and Nephy realized the same thing and grabbed the other side. And while his heart fluttered at the thought of such cooperation, something fell from the distortion.

“Please run away, Lady Oberon!”

It was a familiar voice. And several seconds later, a lump of armor fell where the table was. And looking down at it while it made a clunk, Nephy and Zagan were both left staring in wonder.

“You’re... the boy we met yesterday...?”

“Huh...? Oh, the couple from the carriage?”

The one to fall to the floor, covered in wounds, was for some reason the young Archangel boy that they had picked up yesterday in the carriage.



Several minutes earlier.

“We finally found you! You thieving rats!”

Ginias drew his Sacred Sword as he gallantly roared at the

intruders. Eleven Archangels and Oberon formed six groups of two to suppress the intruders. And the first to find said intruders were Ginias and Oberon.

"I, Ginias, offer my thanks to God for granting this opportunity at vindication for what happened the other day!"

The intruders looked truly fed up at his stuffy monologue.

"Ugh, what a pain. How did you get back already?"

"Aristella is shocked."

The intruders were two young girls. However, Ginias learned not to be deceived by their appearance.

"Lady Oberon, I shall hold back the dual-sword user! Please take care of the longsword user!"

The one who had sent the two of them into the middle of the Katachnia wasteland was the girl wielding two scimitars.

The longsword user didn't use sorcery last time. There was no mistaking that she was a sorcerer, but her sorcery likely wasn't suited to battle. Meaning it was logical for the one wielding a Sacred Sword to suppress the dual-sword user. Oberon didn't reply, but Ginias confirmed that she nodded slightly at the corner of his vision.

"I won't hold back! Sing — Raziel!"

Ginias addressed his Sacred Sword, and a green wind flooded from his blade.

"Ugh..."

"Aristella!"

The girl wielding a longsword yelled, but Oberon prevented her from getting in the way.

How reliable! Ginias sealed the movements of the girl using the wind from his Sacred Sword and closed in on her. It was perhaps possible to escape his wind using the physical abilities of a sorcerer, but sorcery couldn't compensate for sword skill. Ginias was the youngest to ever be entrusted with the role of Head Archangel. He wouldn't fall behind with a sword.

The girl held her two scimitars at the ready and muttered something, but no sorcery activated.

"It's useless! The winds of purification can easily blow away any sorcery!"

I won't kill you! Ginias drove the flat of his blade into the girl's body... Or he'd planned to anyway.

"Huh? She's gone?"

The girl in front of him vanished without any prior movement. Ginias didn't feel his sword strike anything either, so she wasn't blown away by it.

"Behind you Ginias."

The young Archangel realized it upon hearing Oberon's voice. His

sword was heavier than usual. The tip of his blade wouldn't move at all, as if it were sewn in place. He turned his head in shock and saw the girl standing on the tip of his sword with a languid look on her face.

"Impossible..."

"It looks like you didn't hear Aristella because of the wind. I'll say it once more. Here's a freebie. You can have the first move."

Those words were the same ones she had muttered while within the winds of purification.

So it wasn't even sorcery...? Ginias froze in shock, and the girl twisted her body as if dancing. Immediately following that, her scimitar came sweeping in from below.

"Ugh!"

Even if he tried to dodge it, the girl was still standing on his sword. It wasn't possible to evade while still poised for combat. Ginias let go of his Sacred Sword and rolled across the ground.

"Good boy. You let go of this troublesome sword."

The girl kicked his Sacred Sword and sent it flying down the opposite side of the passageway. She then dashed in without giving Ginias the time to stand back up.

"I'm not done yet!"

Ginias caught the blade of the scimitar closing in on his neck with the palms of both his hands. The girl's expressionless composure broke upon seeing this, and her eyes shot wide open.

"An Angelic Knight is more than just their sword!"

"Mm. How unexpected."

It wasn't clear whether she was actually surprised or not, but the girl thrust out her other scimitar. Ginias required two hands to stop just a single blade, so he had no way out.

"Come! Raziel!"

As he called his Sacred Sword, it jumped up into the air on its own and attacked the girl's back.

"Tch."

It was now the girl's turn to let go of her sword and roll across the ground. The Sacred Sword she kicked away settled itself in Ginias' hand as if that was where it belonged.

"This boy is the most loved by the Sacred Swords in all history."

This was the reason Ginias sat at the head of the Archangels at his age.

As for Oberon, she was crossing blades with the longsword wielder using her pale thin sword... No, that was no longsword.

"Idiot! Moron! You think I'm just gonna play sword fighting with a knight?"

The blade of the longsword broke apart with a clink. It moved

through the air like a whip and assaulted Oberon from a direction that was impossible for a sword.

“A chain sword? How skillful.”

Such was the case, but Oberon twirled her thin sword and dealt with the whip-like blade. If she tried fending it off simply, the chain sword would wrap around her own and close in on her neck. That was why Oberon flicked away the very tip of the chain sword to make it lose control.

It wasn't as simple as it sounded, however. The tip was the fastest point of a whip in motion, so a human eye could not follow the tip of a real whip. The fact that she deflected the attack despite her sight being obstructed was impressive.

The girl flinched upon seeing this but immediately smiled with an unyielding spirit as she swung her chain sword once more.

“Not bad. But how long can you keep it up?!”

The chain sword closed in while slashing away at the labyrinth's walls, floor, and ceiling. It was pretty reckless swordsmanship which managed to seal all paths of retreat.

“That's quite the number of attacks.”

Oberon accurately repelled each and every blow individually. Neither of them was able to take another step forward, locking them in a stalemate.

I must assist Lady Oberon! Ginias stabbed the scimitar he was holding into the ground and turned to face the young girl before him.

“It seems you possess more skill with the sword among the two of you as well. Though you may be a sorcerer, I shall praise your swordsmanship. However, this is where it ends.”

The girl let out a listless sigh.

“Aristella is the sword specialist.”

“Huh...? What do you mean?”

“Exactly what I said.”

And just a moment later, Ginias suddenly realized the meaning behind her words.

“Lady Oberon! Get away from her!”

“Kyahaha! Too late!”

The chain sword appeared to be flying around recklessly, but it was actually weaving together a precisely detailed magic circle. And Oberon was standing at its center.

“Dexia is the sorcery specialist.”

Ginias charged in before thinking it over. He pushed Oberon away with a shoulder tackle and managed to get her out of the magic circle. And just as the sorcery completed...

“Have a nice flight, dumbass!”

The scenery around him warped. It was the same teleportation

sorcery he'd been subjected to three days before, but he only came to understand this a moment too late.



Back to the top floor room in the Jewel of Raziel.

"Wh-Why are you two here?"

The young boy raised his voice with both shock and vigilance, to which Zagan shook his head in astonishment.

"Why? This is our room. I should be asking *you* where you flew in from."

Zagan questioned the boy as if he had no idea where the young boy had appeared from.

"Your room...? Sorry, where am I? Are we in Raziel?"

Zagan walked over to the window reluctantly and threw open the curtains.

"This is an inn called the Jewel of Raziel. You can see Raziel's central cathedral over there, right?"

After explaining it, the boy seemed to come to grips with his situation. He looked around his surroundings restlessly, and upon spotting Nephy, he bobbed his head down.

"My apologies. I'll get out immediately."

He still had his Sacred Sword gripped in his hand. He got back up to his feet in a panic as Zagan kept him from leaving.

"Wait. You're injured. I don't know what happened, but at least allow us to treat you."

"But—"

"Can that mission or whatever you're doing be accomplished in this state? Isn't it the duty of an Angelic Knight to challenge their missions in as flawless a state as possible?"

After being admonished, the young boy turned silent, unable to object at all.

"I'm in your debt."

"Can you do it... h-honey?"

"Yes, dear."

It really was still embarrassing, but Nephy replied right away while the tips of her ears turned red. Though, the boy covered his face as if unable to bear watching that exchange.

"I've been causing you nothing but trouble."

"Don't worry about it. Isn't it the obligation of the people to cooperate with those who possess Sacred Swords?"

Humans were capable of smiling all the more gently when they were thinking of bad things. Zagan smiled as if it was the most natural thing in the world, which made the boy's eyes shoot open.

"You noticed?"

“Wouldn’t any pious believer notice?”

He left out the detail that he wasn’t one himself, but he wasn’t lying.

The boy smiled in admiration.

“You’ve really been doing nothing but surprising me. Both back in the carriage and here with the depth of your refinement.”

“No need to flatter me. It makes me feel itchy.”

Zagan shrugged his shoulders in an exaggerated manner, and the boy forced a smile, having loosened his vigilance significantly.

He looked quite dirty, but his wounds didn’t seem particularly serious. It was likely more a result of him falling earlier than anything he got in battle. His treatment ended quickly, and after they’d finished, Zagan addressed him again to calm him down some more.

“So? What happened?”

“Our treasury has been infiltrated by thieves. Lady Oberon and I went in to subjugate them, but I suffered an embarrassing defeat, just as you can see.”

The boy seemed to have relaxed his guard considerably after being treated. He let slip exactly what had happened upon being pressed for information.

Hmm. So that’s really what happened... Orias was also supposed to be on her way to take back the staff. She was moving in secret, but there was no way the church wouldn’t make a racket over an Archdemon taking action. Well, Shere Khan and Bifrons also seemed to be cooperating, so the likelihood that this was their handiwork instead was quite high.

Zagan shifted his attention to the ceiling.

I don’t know who it is, but they’re quite the skilled sorcerer... The traces of the sorcery that the boy had fallen through remained above them. They were more skillful with teleportation than the novice Zagan was. It was likely they had not only designated a change in elevation but chosen a random destination as well. Useless in terms of effective movement, but perfect for repelling an enemy.

There weren’t all that many sorcerers who could activate flight sorcery before hitting the ground, and it was almost unrivaled against Angelic Knights. The fact that the boy had ended up here could have been thanks to tremendous luck, or perhaps...

The Sacred Sword could have guided him here... Thanks to his fight with Andrealphus, Zagan was fully aware that an entity called a seraph was sealed within all Sacred Swords. It wasn’t all that strange for it to perform some sort of miracle to save its wielder. It may have been the reason this young boy was chosen as an Archangel.

In any case, by the time his treatment was over, Zagan finished analyzing the structure of the sorcery which had sent the boy flying

away.

It'll be difficult to wrench open, but I should be able to connect to where he came from by using the same sorcery. Zagan was able to mimic sorcery by using his ability to devour sorcery without actually devouring it. Ultimately, sorcery was something that anybody could use as long as they knew the theory.

Hence Zagan had developed his ability to reflect and absorb sorcery to the point where he could imitate it. Andrealphus' advice was rather useful, although it vexed him to admit that.

The boy struck the floor in irritation.

"Ugh. It's a small mercy that I came out in Raziel, but how much time will it take to chase after them from here?"

"Hm. I don't know your exact circumstances, but can't you return using that?"

Zagan pointed up at the ceiling like he had just noticed it. The teleportation circle that Zagan had repaired and connected back to its source was shining brilliantly.

"It looked to me like you fell from there..."

The boy shot up to his feet with his eyes wide open.

"Oh! I can go back!"

Just as he was about to plunge through, the boy stopped and turned to Zagan.

"I must apologize once more. I will definitely repay—"

"Enough already. You're in a hurry, right?"

"Right!"

"Good luck."

Zagan waved his hand, Nephy bobbed her head down, and the young boy leaped gallantly through the magic circle. After seeing him off, Zagan pointed Nephy to her hat and coat.

"Well then, shall we get going ourselves?"

"Huh...?"

"To Raziel's underground treasury. You said you wanted to go see it, right?"

With that, Nephy smiled like a blooming flower.

"Yes!"

Thus the unprecedented incident of three different Archdemons being allowed to infiltrate the church headquarters was headed to its climax.

Chapter IV: Archdemons and Archangels Have Gathered, so We Decided to Have a Party

“...Hmph. It seems the intruder before me has been rampaging about.”

Clouds of dust fell from the ceiling, accompanied by a chain of intermittent tremors. It seemed that someone was fighting above this giant armored man in Raziel's great underground labyrinth.

It was none other than Raphael. After escorting Zagan and Nephy to Raziel, he had infiltrated the great labyrinth once he had permission to act on his own. His artificial left arm glimmered dimly and illuminated the area around him.

His goal was, of course, to make contact with Archdemon Orias. If his already-aging body could gain more power, then he would even rely on an Archdemon to do so.

This place is truly easy to infiltrate for members, after all. In fact, the keys to the treasury were the Sacred Swords themselves. The labyrinth was set up so anyone not carrying a Sacred Sword was assaulted by a countless number of traps. Meaning the only ones who could enter the treasury directly were the twelve Archangels.

Even as the oldest Archangel, excluding Michael, Raphael only knew of the entrance at the central cathedral. The people who built this place likely never considered the possibility of a traitor Archangel. Well, in a sense, the betrayal of an Archangel spelled the demise of the church. It was somewhat meaningless to hypothesize such a scenario.

Such was the case, but by the time Raphael had infiltrated the place, it had already turned into a labyrinth and was flinging traps at another intruder.

I've heard Archdemon Orias was somewhat smarter about this, though... In that case it would be appropriate to consider the existence of another intruder. One week had passed since Orias had vanished. He was worried that she had perhaps already come and gone, but judging from the current state of things, there was still some hope that she hadn't. At the very least, she hadn't returned to her hideout two days ago.

There was Raphael, Orias, a third intruder, and depending on the

circumstances, it was likely that Zagan would sneak in while sightseeing too. Raphael had already turned his back on them, but this day seemed like it would be a disaster for the church.

He continued to proceed through the treasury by relying on his old memories and found people tumbling on the ground further down the path.

“Ugh... Keep it together, Aristella... Everything... will be fine...”

“...Hak... Ugh... Who the hell is that woman...?”

It was two girls who appeared to be sorcerers. They were hurt quite badly and were bleeding from the head with wounds all over their bodies. The girl dressed like a bandit was lending her shoulder to the girl dressed in frilly clothing. Judging by their wounds, they’d been injured by a sword rather than any form of sorcery.

Are these two intruders? He had no obligation to save them. On the contrary, they were more like rivals. Having said that, delivering the coup de grâce to women and children on the verge of death pained his heart somewhat.

Raphael at least kept himself on guard so that he could draw his Sacred Sword at any time, and when they finally noticed his presence, one of the girls looked up at him.

“Eep, an Angelic Knight...”

Her hand lit up with sorcery. She likely wouldn’t die if he hit her with the flat of his blade. But just as Raphael was about to grab his sword, a jarring shriek ran through the air.

“AAAAAAAAAFAAAAAAAAAAAAAAUL! ETAAAAAAN DAAAAAAA SAAAAAAAACEEEEEED SOOOOOOOOOOOOORD!”

A pale shadow appeared before him. It didn’t really have the shape of a person and was likely some manner of ghost. It seemed to be saying something, but it didn’t have a jaw and was largely unintelligible.

Is this one of the treasury’s traps? Though it was largely triggered by these two girls, it was still reacting to Raphael. And with no other choice, Raphael swung his artificial arm in the air.

“GWAH?!”

The ghost, which somehow or other resembled a cardinal, slammed into a wall and vanished.

“Hm? Does that ghost perhaps have some manner of grudge against me?”

People with a grudge against Raphael were basically a dime a dozen, so he had no idea who it could possibly be. He then shifted his attention to the girls cowering at his feet. And seeing their sullied faces, Raphael’s eyes shot open.

“...Hm? Why the hell are you here?”

It was definitely someone he recognized.

“Huh...?”

“Hm...? Am I mistaken?”

The girl looking blankly back at him had the exact same face as the girl next to her. They appeared to be twins. Both of them reacted like they had no idea who Raphael was. Well, that was perhaps understandable since he was hiding his face, but a sorcerer would surely be able to recognize him by voice. The time they met was back at Zagan’s castle, after all.

Meaning this is someone else. They look very similar though.

Having sensed hostility from Raphael, the girl put her brow against the ground.

“Judging from your ability to defeat a ghost without sorcery and that armored figure, you are the former Archdemon candidate, Apparition Valefor, correct?”

He was wearing armor different from Valefor’s, but apparently the girl decided this based on his height and appearance.

I suppose I’m using that name when outside, so it isn’t wrong. And after hesitating over how to answer her, Raphael nodded.

“Indeed. And who the hell are you lot?”

“Sir! I am Archdemon Shere Khan’s subordinate, Dexia. And this one is called Aristella.”

The bandit looking girl was Dexia, and the frilly looking one was Aristella. The latter was suffering from serious wounds, and it was clear that her consciousness was hazy. Raphael cupped Aristella’s chin.

“Can you not use healing sorcery? If you can, then treat her. I’ll at least wait that long.”

“R-Right! Hang in there Aristella. I’ll heal you now.”

Dexia was moved to tears and began treating the other girl. Ghosts popped up here and there while she was doing so, and since they were annoying, Raphael swatted them all away. Shortly after, her treatment was complete. Dexia wiped her brow and looked up at Raphael.

“Are you done?”

“Y-Yes. I’ve only stopped the bleeding, but she should be fine for now.”

Dexia gingerly placed her on her lap and replied with a relieved look.

“So? What the hell are you two doing here?”

Dexia straightened herself up in a panic and bowed her head.

“Sir! We’ve infiltrated this treasury at our master’s command. Judging from your presence here, I assume you share the same goal?”

“Indeed. So?”

The sorcerer was telling him her reason for being here. There was

no way she had entered aimlessly. Dexia gulped from the tension, and her next words were...

"We can guide you to the treasury. Can we enlist your cooperation?"

Unfortunately for them, Raphael already knew the path to the treasury.

Still, I suppose my liege wouldn't abandon them here. On the off chance that they became an obstruction to Zagan, everything would be fine as long as Raphael took responsibility and dealt with them. Besides, it was true that he had business in the treasury to attend to.

"Very well."

Aristella, who had shown no signs of being able to stand up until now, raised her right hand.

"Eek!"

"Awawa! Aristella?!"

The girl must have been cornered pretty badly earlier, and she began trembling in Dexia's arms violently.

"Don't lose your mind over every little thing. I said I'll cooperate."

"Oh... Right."

The two of them calmed down, and Dexia rose to her feet.

"Th-This way."

They still seemed to be nervous, but the girls began guiding him to the treasure.

"So? Who did this to you?"

The others present in the labyrinth were likely Archdemon Orias and any Archangels who had noticed their intrusion. He wanted to get an idea of who was there. And yet, Dexia's answer was completely unexpected.

"It was an Angelic Knight named Oberon or something."

It was one of the two knights they picked up in the carriage the other day. Raphael knew that this was the name used for generations by technicians behind the creation of Anointed Armor. In fact, the first time he'd heard the words "Azazel's Staff," that was the first person to come to mind. It was likely that she had taken action to defend the staff after sensing that it was their target.

Raphael had never seen Oberon for himself while he'd served as an Archangel. Up until yesterday, he'd believed that the technician known as Oberon was just a fabrication of the church.

"Oberon? Not an Archangel?"

"There was also an Archangel, but we dealt with that one."

"Hmm..."

He didn't know who they had dealt with, but apparently, these girls possessed enough power to defeat a wielder of a Sacred Sword.

It'd be nice if it wasn't Chastille. That girl was the bridge between

the church and the sorcerers. He pinned the hopes of the Unification Faction on her, making her the person Raphael had to protect the most, right next to Foll. Although Zagan also attached a bodyguard to her, so she likely wouldn't die.

"But... that woman... was hiding... her power..." Aristella added in a weakened voice.

"She wasn't using a Sacred Sword, but..."

"She cut down... Aristella's sorcery... It doesn't make... any sense..."

Raphael nodded back at them.

Hmm, is it something like Kuroka's short swords? Those swords were one of Liucaon's Holy Treasures, which possessed power similar to that of a Sacred Sword. The history of the church was quite long. It wouldn't be strange if they had other such relics hidden away.

Actually, it's more likely that it's something made by the technician who makes Anointed Armor. As a high elf, Nephy was capable of manufacturing more powerful Anointed Armor than the church. Meaning there was a high likelihood that other such relics of the elves existed. Back when Zagan had visited Nephy's hometown a few months ago, he'd found a legendary weapon that wasn't quite on the level of a Sacred Sword. And considering all those possibilities, Raphael nodded once more.

"I have some knowledge of such weapons. I didn't think they'd exist in the church though."

"There are other things like that out there?" Dexia asked while trembling. "But... her skills are scarier than her sword. She's way stronger than the Archangel. It looked like she was hiding her real skills while they were together, but the moment we let our guard down, we were done in right away..."

Well, they were powerful enough to boast of defeating an Archangel.

"Allow me to ask. Who was the Archangel you defeated?"

"I don't know his name. It was some little brat."

"He said... he was... Ginias..."

"Oh! Right! That!"

Raphael let out a silent sigh.

Ginias' orphan, huh? He was a youngster with potential, so Raphael found this somewhat regrettable. But it would be barking up the wrong tree to blame these two girls. On one hand, there was an Archangel, and on the other were two sorcerers. Enemies meant to fight each other fought. It was his fault for being too weak.

And with no way of knowing what Raphael was thinking about, Dexia continued speaking.

"But I heard the other ten are in here too, so just taking care of

one of them doesn't get us anywhere."

"What? All ten?"

Raphael had heard that Chastille had come to the Holy City for a meeting of Archangels, but he never would have thought that all eleven Archangels had actually convened.

It's said that if all twelve Sacred Swords are gathered, they could even defeat an Archdemon. He didn't think it was remotely possible against an Archdemon of Zagan or Orias' caliber, but the gathering of Sacred Swords and Archdemons here in this labyrinth was somewhat ominous.

"...Good grief. It's become quite troublesome."

As such, he was unable to keep himself from sighing this time.



Around the same time, Chastille and Valjakka were progressing through the labyrinth.

"The tremors have stopped. Have things been settled?"

"It was likely Ginias or Diekmeyer who was engaged in combat. The Juutilainen brothers wouldn't be making such gentle sounds."

The sounds that had been resounding throughout the labyrinth had come to a halt half a minute ago.

It'd be fine and all if the thieves were suppressed, but if not, that means one of the Archangels has fallen. Chastille cast her eyes to the floor.

"Worried?" Valjakka asked.

"Of course I am. Even if we're opposed in opinion, they're still my comrades."

"I'm relieved to hear that."

Chastille knit her brows.

"What do you mean by that, Lord Valjakka?"

Valjakka shrugged his shoulders in an exaggerated manner.

"I believe in you, but there's no way I can loosen my guard after hearing the rumors about you, right? At any rate, it's said that you're connected to Archdemon Zagan, who's been the topic of our recent troubles."

"I feel like it isn't great that such rumors exist, but it's true that I have indeed bound myself to him with an oath."

"An oath?"

Valjakka suddenly narrowed his gaze, to which Chastille replied with resolution.

"That's right. There will be no future for this world if the church and sorcerers are to continue fighting each other until one of us perishes. Just like the church is a necessity to serve as a deterrent against sorcerers, sorcerers are required by the weak. That's why I

want to grasp that boundary line that we are both unable to yield and find a way to live across that line from each other.”

“...Do you truly believe the church will acknowledge such a thing?”

“If they won’t acknowledge it, I’ll just need the church to change until they do. I’ll become as strong as I need to until it does.”

The two of them stared each other down and the first to give in was Valjakka.

“Such nonsense... is what I’d like to say. However, it seems you’re serious.”

“You believe me?”

He looked up at the ceiling helplessly.

“After seeing that you even have an elf on your side, I have no choice but to accept it, right? I’d wager that even Diekmeyer will cooperate with you. In which case you’re already an influence in the church that they cannot possibly ignore.”

Chastille never thought he would accept, so she was left staring in wonder. Valjakka then bowed to her.

“Allow me to apologize in exchange for acknowledging you as a full-fledged Archangel.”

“...What do you mean?”

“It’s about Sylvester, your brother. I was an incompetent superior for allowing him to die.”

“That’s not...”

Valjakka shook his head.

“That day, we were handling an incident called the rare species hunt. However, we were caught in Archdemon Shere Khan’s trap, and I lost many of my subordinates. If not for Sylvester’s devotion, I would also have died there.”

Stopping for a moment there, Valjakka bowed even more deeply.

“The reason I’m able to live while bearing my shame is thanks to Sylvester. I swear to cooperate with you as a means to atone for what happened to him.”

“Lord Valjakka...” Chastille shook her head. “Raise your head, Lord Valjakka. Both my brother and I have been saved just from your regrets over what happened.”

“You’ll say that for me?”

And as tears filled his eyes, a great tremor ran through the labyrinth.



“Dammit, woman! How long are you planning to follow us?!”
Kaltiainen roared in a boisterous voice.

And finding this trouble tiresome, Stella looked up at her teacher.

“You hear him? Hey, can I leave already?”

“Haah... Do you plan on leaving me all alone in this stuffy place? I’ll cry?”

“I also want to cry, though.”

Michael and Kaltiainen had ended up forming a group for entering the underground labyrinth. However, even Stella was forced to come along, maybe out of pure harassment. A vein could be seen twitching about on Kaltiainen’s head.

“It seems like you really want to fucking die, woman.”

“Hey teach, why’d you team up with this geezer anyway?”

Stella completely ignored the roaring middle-aged Archangel. There were ten partners to choose from. Stella would’ve been far more at ease if he’d just paired up with Chastille.

Michael ruffled Stella’s hair up roughly in high spirits.

“Don’t be so mean. Kaltiainen’s a good guy, ya know? He just hates sorcerers so much that they disgust him.”

“I also hate you so much that it disgusts me though.”

“See?”

Stella didn’t know what she was supposed to get from that, but Michael had apparently put some thought into this in his own little way... or at least she hoped he had. And as she held back a headache, Michael suddenly made a serious face.

“Well, let’s cut the jokes out already. Kaltiainen’s about the only one I can trust unconditionally in this case.”

“What about Chastille?”

“Well, she’s also the honest type and won’t lie, but when it comes to Zagan, it all goes in one ear and out the other. So I refrained from grouping with her this time.”

Michael boldly exposed the connection between Chastille and Zagan, to which Stella nodded.

So he plans to finish this geezer off here... It was the first she’d heard of it herself, but her teacher planned to have her inherit a Sacred Sword. Meaning the plan was probably to finish off Kaltiainen and steal his sword. Frankly speaking, it was an unwelcome favor for Stella, who preferred to just punch things rather than use a blade.

And yet Kaltiainen snorted as if he wasn’t agitated by any of this.

“Hmph. I don’t like how she’s currying favor with an Archdemon, but the way she will go to any means to struggle for survival is splendid.”

Stella mysteriously didn’t sense any hostility from him as he said that, and she was left cocking her head.

Huh? Didn’t he want to use that as a reason to finish Chastille off?

That girl was Zagan’s, or more specifically, his bride Nephys friend. She was someone who deserved Stella’s protection. And that was why

she was on guard against this man, but judging from his reaction just now, it seemed to be unnecessary. Michael also agreed with a bitter smile.

“Well, with that incident a year ago, the Archangels are just filled with youngsters.”

“I don’t care about their age, but that lot are all eager to die. Those who struggle to live in filth become far stronger than those who want to die a clean death.”

“Going by that logic, won’t the world just get filled with trash?”

“Are you saying reality is different?”

It was as if he was saying he was proof of that very fact. Stella felt like she finally understood why Michael had chosen this man as a partner.

He’s aware of the fact that he’s a villain... Thinking back on it, he’d used the word “holy” with irony during the meeting. In that sense, this man’s thought process was closer to sorcerers. He wasn’t an ally, but perhaps he could be trusted.

Kaltiainen glared at Michael.

“More importantly, Diekmeyer. The fact that you invited me means that you damn well noticed, right?”

“Hm? Oh, you mean about how it feels like there’s a traitor among us?”

“A traitor?”

Stella knit her brows.

“Yeah. There’s someone in the church working with those damn sorcerers. If not, there’s no way even an Archdemon could breach the treasury so easily.”

“Plus, it’s probably their fault Azazel got annihilated.”

It was the name that had come up during the meeting. Stella had been driven out right away, but she naturally eavesdropped during their conversation. And unable to understand what was going on, she cut into their conversation.

“Hey pops, didn’t you suspect Chastille?”

“I did, but she’s not capable of such tricks.”

“Well, she is a crybaby.”

Unexpectedly, her non-work-mode behavior during the meeting proved her innocence. But Stella was still confused.

“Hmm, I still don’t get it. It’s no good to collude with sorcerers, but it’s fine to openly collaborate with them? How is it any different?”

Kaltiainen looked truly exasperated upon hearing this.

“It’s a huge difference. Foolishly working with them in the open is done at your own risk, whereas a traitor sells out their comrades. How many Angelic Knights do you think died because of this traitor?”

Stella thought that the boundary between those two was just a

matter of individual opinion, but she understood what he was trying to say.

Umm, so basically, Chastille isn't getting other people involved, so it's fine? And the problem with the traitor was that they caused other knights to die, so they were bad.

Is it the same guy who's harassing Chastille? Both Zagan and Chastille seemed to be planning to settle things, but Stella thought it'd be fine if she at least helped look for them. Apparently, Michael had teamed up with Kaltiainen so that he could look for them too.

"So, what do you think?" Kaltiainen asked.

"Let's see... The ones who reacted during the meeting were Valjakka, the Juutilainen brothers, and Junior. I don't know much about Hartonen, but he probably doesn't know anything."

"Ginias is a newcomer. I bet he doesn't know much."

"I wonder about that. It's possible that he's being used without even realizing it, right?"

They were likely referring to the boy who had come in at the end. He really did look far too honest and easy to trick. On the other hand, Chastille's non-work mode was basically a ticking bomb, so there was no need to suspect her.

That girl's amazing, huh? Her crybaby behavior is actually working for her to avoid a crisis. That could be said to be a miracle of sorts. It was something that she even wanted to analyze and research as a sorcerer.

And just then...

"Mrgh?"

"Whoa? An earthquake?"

The underground labyrinth shook greatly.



"Lady Oberon! Ugh... I hope she's still safe taking on two sorcerers at once."

Zagan found himself in a dimly lit stone passageway after teleporting. He could hear Ginias' flustered voice further ahead. It seemed Oberon was no longer here. The walls themselves gave off the slightest bit of luminescence, which was enough for a sorcerer to see clearly, but anyone normal or an Angelic Knight would likely need another light source.

Zagan sensed something beneath him and shifted his focus to the floor, where he noticed some sort of crest carved into it. There were tiny letters inscribed within each crest.

Sorcery... or not... is this Elvish? He couldn't sense any power from the letters or crests, but he could guess it was a portion of some manner of elven device.

There was an uncountable number of lacerations on the ceilings

and walls, giving a glimpse of the flashy fight that took place here. And as he confirmed the situation, Zagan muttered to himself, full of interest.

“Hmm. This seems to be the underground treasury of Raziel. Or I suppose the underground labyrinth leading to it.”

“What a mysterious place. Somehow... it feels nostalgic.”

“Nostalgic?”

“Yes. The air here resembles that of the air in the hidden village I lived in just a little.”

“I see. Well, this is a church. Elves may have an affinity with such places. Since we’re here and all, shall we take a little walk?”

“Yes.”

“But it’s somewhat cold here. It’s better to put that on and keep warm, honey.”

“Yes, dear.”

Zagan adjusted his mantle, and Nephy put on her overcoat and hat. And now that they were both dressed warmly, they felt like their hearts had warmed up as well.

“...Wait a minute. Why are the two of you so calm...? I mean, why are you here?”

Ginias finally came to his senses and questioned the couple with a dumbfounded look, to which Zagan simply shrugged his shoulders.

“I’m not sure how to answer myself. We were here before we even realized it. I’d actually like you to explain things to me.”

When he teleported, he’d ended up here. He specifically wanted to know where in the labyrinth he was, and how close to the treasury they were.

Ginias gripped his chest with a pained expression.

“...I see. So you were caught in my teleportation. I don’t even know how to apologize for that.”

Zagan was doing his best to placate him, but the way this boy trusted him without any hint of hesitation had Nephy holding her hands to her chest with a guilty conscience.

“It wasn’t your doing, right? There’s no need to apologize.”

Zagan made a show to be surprised, and Ginias smiled with a small sense of relief.

“It relieves me that you would say so.”

Zagan was truly sorry for this endlessly honest boy.

“Now then, this doesn’t appear to be a place we should be treading upon. I’d like to get out, but which way is the exit?”

Ginias put his hand to his brow, holding back a headache, and shook his head.

“It’s useless. This is Raziel’s treasury. If you move around carelessly, you’ll activate the traps. Please follow me.”

“But won’t we be a hindrance to you?”

“I can’t possibly allow the two of you to die.”

As such, Zagan nodded like he had lost out to Ginias’ persistence.

“Very well. Sorry about this, but allow us to accompany you. The two of us will hide if it gets dangerous. It’s still not safe here, right?”

“Indeed. You truly are wise,” Ginias said, then held up the hilt of his Sacred Sword. “O light.”

A small amount of light poured out from his hilt and illuminated the dim passageway. It didn’t reach all that far, but it was just bright enough so that walking around was possible.

It was unexpected that they’d have company, but Zagan held his hand out to Nephy, and she timidly squeezed his hand with a bashful smile.

Ah, she’s wearing her gloves today. They were the gloves Zagan had gifted to her. They matched her coat well and just looking at her wearing them filled him with happiness.

And so, as they followed behind Ginias, Zagan threw a question his way.

“By the way, is this place related to elves? As you can see, my wife is an elf. It seems she senses something here.”

Nephy’s ears turned bright red upon being called his wife. Ginias looked around awkwardly then cleared his throat with a cough.

“I wonder about that. I haven’t ever heard such stories, but the elves are a sacred existence to the church. They may have been involved here.”

The crests on the ground clearly had Elvish letters written in them, but it appeared Angelic Knights were unable to read it.

Well, I guess there aren’t all that many sorcerers that can read it either. Nephy also appeared to have an interest in the letters on the floor, and she walked along as she stared at them. And suddenly struck with an idea, Zagan called out to Nephy.

“Oh yeah. Are you able to read these letters on the floor, honey?”

“Huh? Me?”

Nephy had only had a basic grasp on reading and writing before meeting Zagan. She only really recognized numbers and her own name. When Zagan had taught her to read and write as a supplement to teaching her sorcery, he had also ended up teaching her Elvish. In short, this was like a test to see whether Nephy was properly studying or not.

Ginias turned around with a surprised look.

“Can you read it?”

“Umm, to an extent.”

Nephy nodded, and Ginias directed his light to the floor. After she stared at the crests for a moment, Nephy’s pink lips trembled as she

began reading it aloud.

“—Please save the endlessly pitiful one — If you are the one who wields the thirteen swords and Sigils, we shall yield the path to you —”

Those were all the words carved around the crest. Nephry took a glance up at Zagan. Her translation was somewhat literal in places, making it hard to interpret its meaning, but he nodded back to her, indicating that she was largely correct.

The first half required no adjustments, but the second half stated that only those who possessed a Sacred Sword or a Sigil of some sort had the qualifications to pass. Zagan’s face slackened at the sight of Nephry smiling with relief, while Ginias muttered in bewilderment.

“Is that everything?”

“Yes. All the stones in this area are engraved with the same words.”

“Hmm. The swords here likely refers to the Sacred Swords, but why thirteen?”

“I’ve heard there are only twelve Sacred Swords, right?”

Meaning there was a thirteenth regardless of the seraph?

Or perhaps a Sacred Sword which sealed Azazel once existed. He could understand what was written here if that were the case. However, Zagan’s focus was on another word.

Thirteen Sigils... It was unreasonable to assume that this referred to the Sigils of the Archdemon. However, there was a ridiculous Archdemon out there like Andrealphus. He couldn’t deny the possibility that there were others affiliated with both sorcery and the church.

“Alshire Imera...”

And that was the name to leave Zagan’s lips as he pondered over it.

“What about Alshire Imera?”

“Oh, nothing... It’s supposed to be the anniversary of a legend where a girl returned from the dead, right?” Zagan researched the legend of the church after the incident on Alshire Imera. “I was just wondering where that girl vanished to after resurrecting.”

“She returned to heaven, of course. Isn’t it only natural for a saint who brought about such a miracle to be welcomed into heaven?”

It was a truly exemplary answer for the church.

“So she died again despite resurrecting?”

Zagan obviously knew that this girl still existed, as she had started freeloading at his castle recently. Ginias likely didn’t possess a clear answer to this though. All he could do was shake his head.

“Does that have something to do with the words written here?”

“Just a bit. Hearing ‘that endlessly pitiful one’ simply reminded

me of the story of that girl is all. Wouldn't you find her pitiful if she was still wandering around this world where nobody recognizes her?"

Making such a statement was bound to buy the animosity of the people from the church, but Ginias nodded in admiration.

"I see, I never thought of it from that perspective." Ginias held up his Sacred Sword. "So these inscriptions may imply the need to save her."

"They just might."

Zagan didn't know whether to make this boy an enemy or an ally, but he honestly nodded along. He then looked around him in an annoyed manner.

I've had a bad feeling ever since coming here. It felt like he was being watched. It was a discomfort that he knew quite well. He felt the same thing back when Kuroka had come to town. And the identity of the one watching him at that time was...

"Heeheehee, looks like all the actors are in place, so let's get this party started, shall we?"

It was basically just as he'd expected. A familiar and irritating voice resounded in the air, and Zagan couldn't hold back a sigh.

"Who goes there?!"

Ginias gallantly brandished his blade, while Zagan scooped Nephy up by the waist. And almost as if that was a signal for things to begin, the floor of the labyrinth suddenly broke apart.



There seemed to be another level of the labyrinth beneath them, and with no more floor at their feet, Zagan, Nephy, and Ginias were now falling through the air.

"We're jumping. Nephy, hang on tightly."

"Yes, Master Zagan."

Zagan whispered in Nephy's ear as the ground collapsed, and she tightly wrapped her arms around his neck. And with his beloved embracing him, Zagan kicked off the fragments of the crumbling floor and escaped into the air.

This much should be possible for someone who isn't a sorcerer. That's because Zagan didn't use any sorcery to reinforce himself. And so, after safely escaping from the rubble, he heard a scream beneath him.

"UAAAAAAH!"

It was Ginias. As one would expect, this situation was difficult for a thirteen-year-old boy to deal with.

What a troublesome brat. At the current rate, it was likely he would get crushed by the falling rubble, so Zagan reluctantly stretched his arm out towards the back of Ginias' neck. Immediately following that, the rubble crashed onto the ground. And with a cloud of dust rising

around him, Zagan safely landed atop the rubble.

Okay, Nephy wasn't hurt at all! After immediately confirming this, he dropped the young boy and corrected his grip on the beloved girl in his arms.

“Uwah!”

“Oops, sorry. Are you okay?”

Ginias toppled over the rubble, and Zagan apologized for his carelessness.

“Wh-Who are you? That manner of movement isn't something a normal person can do.”

“Huh...? Is that so? I think it's perfectly natural for someone to do so for the sake of protecting their wife though.”

At any rate, Zagan needed to surpass the entirety of the church and every sorcerer. This much was nothing to boast about. Nephy, on the other hand, was turning redder and redder and buried her face in Zagan's chest.

“Hmm. The footing here is poor. Be careful.”

Zagan carefully lowered her on top of the rubble, and Nephy took uncertain steps as she stood herself upright.

Mm. It's dangerous, so we should hold hands! Zagan gripped her right hand, and Nephy timidly wrapped her fingers between his. And watching the two of them do so, Ginias smiled bitterly as if giving in to Zagan's logic.

“I see. So it's a necessary strength for you.”

However, Zagan wasn't looking at Ginias. The space they had fallen into was a large room. It was about the same size as his throne room back at the castle. There was enough room to stand over a hundred people in a line.

At the center of the room stood a stone pedestal, somewhat like a throne, with a single staff sticking upright out of it. It gave off a pale glimmer like silver, but that glow was mana — or by the church's definition, aura — and wasn't a property of silver.

Mithril... Is that Azazel's Staff?

And noticing Zagan's gaze, Ginias raised his voice.

“This can't be... Is this the treasury? Did someone break through our labyrinth?”

This was apparently the treasury. Taking a closer look at the floor, there was a colorful assortment of jewels and gold which was ruthlessly crushed by the rubble. It was somewhat comical that all this treasure they hoarded by collecting forced donations from the public was so splendidly put to waste like that.

The area around the staff was no exception either. About half the pedestal was missing, and there was even a dirty broom tumbling about on the ground. Zagan simply didn't notice all this because of the

sublime glow of the mithril.

And seemingly brought to their senses by Ginias' shocked voice, groans could be heard all over the room.

"Ow... Are you hurt, Lord Valjakka?"

"I'm fine... You also appear unharmed, Chastille."

Zagan's body stiffened up with a jolt. He turned to the familiar voice and spotted a girl with red hair getting to her feet a short distance away from him.

Ah, I didn't expect the crybaby to be here as well... It was pretty much guaranteed that Zagan's identity would be exposed. Well, he had been informed that she would be in the Holy City, so it was careless of him not to foresee this situation, even if he was all giddy on his fake honeymoon.

Chastille immediately noticed Zagan and raised her voice.

"Huh...? Ah! Why are you—?"

"Hm? Is that Ginias?"

Chastille was brought to her senses by the voice of the Angelic Knight next to her and covered her mouth in a panic.

"Gah! No way! Why is that brat still alive?"

"Dexia, you're too loud. It'll be tough to take on so many Sacred Swords at once right now."

Zagan took a look over to the whispering voices and spotted two girls who looked like sorcerers hiding in the passageway's shadows, as well as a fully armored Raphael. He didn't quite understand their grouping, but they seemed to be the intruders who had snuck into the treasury.

Taking another look around the room, there were signs of people stirring all over.

The one hiding behind the rubble there is Oberon, I think. It seemed that she didn't want to be spotted here and took up a position where the other Angelic Knights couldn't see her. Among the others in the room was Michael, who was shamelessly giggling, and for some reason, Stella was with him.

Huh? Why's she dressed like an Angelic Knight? He didn't know what her current circumstances were, but Stella also looked speechless upon spotting Zagan.

Ginias' Sacred Sword then began to tremble with a jarring hum. And it wasn't just his, even Chastille and Michael's swords were humming.

One of the Angelic Knights then muttered in disbelief.

"They're resonating? Does that mean all twelve Sacred Swords are gathered here?"

And with that, all gazes naturally gathered on Zagan.

Well, I guess I'm the only outsider here. In other words, all twelve

Archangels, including Raphael, were gathered in this room. Zagan couldn't help but sigh.

Twelve Sacred Swords and four Archdemons. This is going to become a ridiculous uproar... And after observing the faces of everyone present, Zagan was left somewhat confused. There was a strangely large number of young Archangels. He heard Raphael was the oldest, but the gap between him and most of the others was quite large.

How odd... Still, now's not the time to get all curious... And the moment he began considering how to deceive them all, another voice rang through the air.

"Heeheehee, that's right! That's because the man standing right there is none other than the one who possesses the lost Sacred Sword! Right, Archdemon Zagan?"

Ah, that damn Bifrons really does the most hateful things... It may have been better to just listen to Barbatos' warning at the time and kill the Archdemon instead of doing something so halfhearted as trying to punish them. Barbatos was surely rolling in laughter himself, seeing that the shadow at Chastille's feet was squirming about.

Tension ran through the bodies of all the Archangels as they focused their gazes on Zagan. Bifrons' goal was likely also the staff. Having said that, it wasn't all that simple to outwit twelve Archangels and Zagan at the same time, even for an Archdemon.

So the best plan was to stick one's enemies against one's other enemies. Zagan was planning on doing that himself.

And the first to step forth at this revelation was none other than Ginias.

"Don't be deceived! These two are but simple civilians! Is the owner of that voice not the Archdemon here?!"

"But what are civilians even doing here?! Isn't it strange?!"

One of the young Angelic Knights pointed out something perfectly obvious.

"That's because..." Ginias faltered. In any case, Zagan managed to get some information out of him and got some use from him to get here too. It really was pitiful to fool him any longer, so Zagan spoke for himself as if it wasn't all that big a deal.

"Oh, now that I think of it, I never named myself. I'm Zagan. I've taken residence near Kianoides and serve as a king among sorcerers."

Ginias' face froze over as if he had just been betrayed.

"No way... You're lying, right?"

It was somewhat pitiful, but this would also serve as a lesson not to trust sorcerers. It felt like this might serve as an impetus for him to build a grudge against sorcerers, but Angelic Knights and sorcerers were enemies to begin with. This was how it was supposed to be.

Zagan removed his right glove and revealed his Sigil of the

Archdemon. A storm of mana suddenly broke out, and the Archangels all gulped.

Ginias was completely stupefied. Whereas Chastille was surely getting ready for battle. She was looking at both Zagan and the Angelic Knights vigilantly. Stella was keeping silent, but she was wisely keeping watch on Michael's movements. As for Michael, he was simply averting his gaze indifferently like this had nothing to do with him.

Zagan then steadily spread out his arm and pushed it into his chest pocket. And while he made that exaggerated gesture to overpower the room, he shot a look to Raphael.

Don't move from there... It would be bad for the knights here to find out Raphael was still alive. Zagan was the one to bring out this situation, so there was no need to take on any further risks. The remaining uncertain elements were Oberon and Bifrons, but it was probably fine to leave Oberon at large.

Now to smoke Bifrons out. Zagan removed his hand from his pocket, retrieving his pipe.

"Ugh, it must be some tool for sorcery!"

"Don't let your guard down, Julius!"

The Angelic Knights put themselves on guard with sweat on their brows, preparing themselves for some sort of atrocious sorcery. And as they did, Zagan idly held up his hand and turned his attention over to Nephly at his side.

"Oh yeah, Nephly. Now that I think of it, what's the proper way of holding this?"

"Ah, right."

Nephly lined her fingers over Zagan's and guided his thumb and index finger into the correct positions.

"The elegant way of holding it is to place your finger on the bottom here around the center."

"Hmm. It'll require practice to get used to."

"It suits you, Master Zagan."

The two of them then began giggling.

"What exactly are you showing us?"

"Is this also some manner of sorcery?"

Several of the Angelic Knights groaned, unable to bear it any longer. Even so, Zagan put tobacco in his pipe with calm motions and lit it. After puffing out some smoke, he suddenly turned to Michael as if he just noticed him.

"Ooh, isn't that Archangel Michael Diekmeyer over there?"

Zagan went out of his way to name Michael, who was trying his best to pretend not to know him.

"Ah, idiot, don't look this—"

Michael raised his voice in a fluster, but it was too late.

“I’ve truly come to fancy this tobacco you recommended to me as a sign of our friendship.”

“Y-YOU ASSSSSSSSSSSSS!”

“Ahah! Ahahahahahaha! You look hilarious , teach!”

“Quiet, you!”



Michael's resentful shrieks were truly pleasant to the ears.

Hmph. Just be glad I didn't call you Andrealphus. Now the Angelic Knights would have to be vigilant about covering their backs. They surely hadn't forgotten about Bifrons either. There was no way Zagan would let them all get along happily. Stella, on the other hand, was still cackling loudly.

Zagan then finally turned his attention to the remaining Archangels.

"By the way, gentlemen, is this place not sacred to the church? You've got intruders here. Shouldn't you be capturing them?"

"H-He's coming!" Chastille exclaimed.

Zagan raised his index finger, and a black flame appeared above it. Surely aware of what he was about to do, Chastille turned remarkably pale as she screamed.

"S-Seriously?! Everyone take cover!"

It wasn't clear how much they trusted her, but the other Angelic Knights could tell from her desperation that something serious was about to happen. They all leaped out of Zagan's way.

Mmm, they've been properly trained... Zagan made sure to avoid any of the Archangels and pointed his finger steadily at the staff.

"Heaven's Phosphor — Single Petal."

A single black nail shot out from his finger.

This is a miniature version of the Fivefold Flower... Firing five of the needles at the same time was what made up the Fivefold Flower. This sorcery was capable of destroying even a demon, but it had a flaw in that its destructive power was too high, and it obliterated anything and everything in the area. The Single Petal was an experiment of sorts to help progress his research, but it had just enough destructive power to take care of whatever he wanted dead. And his aim this time was pointed at the church's staff.

"Oh no! The staff!"

"Now's not the time for that! Get out of the way!"

They all managed to get out of the effective range of his spell. The needle made direct contact with the staff, but it showed no signs of breaking.

"...You really are an unpleasant guy. What did you plan on doing if I didn't protect the staff?"

A glass-like wall took shape in front of the staff. It was likely a terrifyingly high-level defensive spell, but it crumbled away while Zagan was trying to observe it. And as it did, a sorcerer who couldn't be identified as a boy or a girl appeared behind it.

"Hmm, to think you managed to defend against Heaven's Phosphor, even if I did hold it back. You really are an Archdemon,

Bifrons.”

Zagan clapped his hands for show, which made Bifrons reply with a spite filled smile.

“Hey there, Archdemon Zagan. All I did was tease you a little, and you tried to break the treasure. You’re like a child throwing a tantrum, you know?”

“Nothing of the sort. I simply believed you would block it.”

“Aah, nevermind. That’s not what I want to talk about.” Bifrons grinned. “Let’s talk about your cute little daughter. She was coughing up blood, you know? Is she okay?”

“F-Foll!”

Nephy gulped, and Zagan gently embraced her shoulder.

“Don’t worry. She’s gotten stronger. Strong enough for this bastard to bestow her a name.”

Zagan was aware that Bifrons attacked Foll.

This guy’s vision is unexpectedly narrow. Zagan completely thought Bifrons withdrew upon noticing that Zagan was watching, but apparently, the Archdemon just ran away normally.

Bifrons smiled like an innocent child.

“Hehehe, and you came here to play despite knowing that? It doesn’t suit the rumors of how much human emotion still burns within you. What are you getting all merry for?”

“My daughter sent me off with her best wishes. What kind of parent would refuse that?”

This was the reason Zagan had gone to have fun on a little vacation despite it being baffling to everyone around him.

I’d be hopeless if I was the one to cause her to worry. He had to show that he was capable of playing around properly once in a while, or those around him wouldn’t be able to relax. Having said that, it pissed him off that Bifrons said that in front of Nephy and caused her to feel shaken.

Zagan laughed lightly.

“Well, let’s stop our talks of human emotion there.”

“Oh? What’s this? Did something happen?”

“I actually intended to be quite considerate to you though?”

Bifrons likely didn’t understand the meaning behind this. The Archdemon knit their brows, and Zagan answered with a gentle smile.

“Didn’t the big sister you loved so much leave you precisely because you couldn’t understand human emotions?”

And with that, it felt like one could hear something snap in the air.

“...Wait, isn’t that really bad?” Michael said as he scratched his head.

At the same time, Bifrons’ body vanished.

“Don’t get ahead of yourself youngster!”

“Aren’t we both youngsters?”

Sand-like crystals gathered in the air and squirmed about as if being sucked into Zagan’s body. And just at that time, Zagan swung his fist.

“Ugh!”

Both Zagan and Bifrons groaned.

This guy is disconnected from the sorcery! The movement of the crystals couldn’t be stopped by devouring the sorcery. Even though it was being moved with mana, it was different in nature from sorcery.

The crystals slipped through his clothes, stuck to his body, and pierced into him, attempting to gouge out his heart. It seemed there was no need to even change the crystals into the shape of a hand or a blade or anything if Bifrons was serious. And if Zagan had been just a moment too late, he likely would’ve had his heart gouged out.

Zagan used the crystals as a medium to slam his mana into Bifrons’ very existence. The Archdemon’s body appeared in mid-air, red in the face, and fell to the ground. And at the same time, Zagan fell to his knee.

“Master Zagan!”

“...We were just fooling around a little. This is nothing.”

However, in the short amount of time it had taken Zagan to respond to Nephy, Bifrons’ body once more crumbled away into debris.

“Raphael!” Zagan reflexively yelled. The crystallized Bifrons wasn’t heading towards Zagan but was crawling toward Raphael, who was hiding secretly in the rubble.

“Burn to ash — Metatron!”

Raphael immediately drew his Sacred Sword and unleashed the flames of purification, but Bifrons’ crystals advanced on him despite being burned. However, the one to scream at that point wasn’t Raphael.

“Aristella! Gah!”

The two girls who were with Raphael were swallowed by the swarm of crystals.

“Heehee. I have a promise with Shere Khan, you see. So I’ll be retrieving these.”

After that, both Bifrons and the girls vanished without a trace.

“Tch!”

Dammit! I’ve been had! Bifrons didn’t get goaded by Zagan’s provocations at all. Attacking Zagan, getting punched, everything was part of a plan to abduct those two girls. All that was left behind was Raphael, with his identity now exposed. Bifrons had claimed complete and utter victory, while inconveniencing Zagan at the same time.

One of the middle-aged Archangels timidly raised his voice.

“That sword... Not just that... The fact that Metatron replied... Is that you, Raphael?”

It was impossible to explain their way out of this situation, so Raphael let out a small sigh and removed his helmet.

“It has been a long time, everyone.”

The Angelic Knight next to Chastille then raised his voice in shock.

“Impossible! A man of your caliber betrayed us?!”

“Betrayed? Hmm, I suppose I have. I did kill a cardinal and flee, after all.”

“That’s wrong!” Chastille screamed. “Cardinal Clavwell was assassinating Archangels for generations! That’s why Lord Raphael had no choice but to cut him down! It was the church who betrayed him!”

And this was where Michael finally decided to chime in.

“So, he ended up living under the patronage of Zagan, who had a cordial relationship with the Unification Faction, right?”

Raphael said nothing and simply shrugged his shoulders. That itself was a sufficient reply for those gathered. Over half of them, especially the younger knights, were clearly perturbed. They all began hesitating, unsure of who they should be pointing their swords at.

And yet, Zagan was still unable to hold back a grimace.

Ugh, dammit. It’s just getting more and more complicated... He really just wanted to get back to sightseeing with Nephry. There was also Foll’s matter, so it was about time that he finished up their trip. In any case, he just wanted to leave already.

It would probably have been fine to just take Raphael and leave, but Michael likely didn’t plan to let him leave so that he could recover his position. And above all else, it didn’t seem like these Archangels were going to let him go after the treasury had been reduced to such a state.

If there was one person capable of breaking this situation, it would be Oberon, who had yet to say anything until now.

But I doubt she’ll do anything... She had relaxed her body and showed no signs of wanting to participate.

They were in a complete stalemate. However, something unexpected broke the stalemate in an instant.

“Master Zagan, shall we return to the castle? I’m worried about Foll.”

“...You’re right. I’ve got to punch Bifrons anyway, so let’s head back.”

Zagan nodded without hesitation at his beloved bride’s suggestion. And seeing that the one who could be considered the primary culprit

behind this entire incident was planning to leave, the Angelic Knights stiffened with anger. The stalemate had crumbled ever so easily.



“Don’t... screw with us!”

Several Archangels drew their Sacred Swords and pointed them at Zagan at once.

Mmm... There’s no need to hesitate. It’s nice and simple. He just had to punch everyone who got in his way and go home. That would solve everything.

“Geez! Why do you always do whatever you want?!”

Chastille also took action while looking like she was holding back a headache. And the first to let loose their sword was...

“Shine — Sacred Sword Azrael!”

A burst of light was let loose the moment she drew her sword from its sheath. The light wasn’t directed at Zagan, but at the Archangels. Several of the knights had the swords knocked out of their hands, while the others blocked the blow with their own swords or dodged out of the way.

“Damn you, Lillqvist! So you really have betrayed us!”

The Angelic Knights directed their anger at Chastille and tried to pick their Sacred Swords back up, but they were once more blocked by her light.

“Don’t misunderstand me. You’re the ones I’m protecting here.” She then looked down at the Archangels who had dropped their swords. “All the ones who dropped their swords failed. Were you planning on challenging an Archdemon despite being unable to withstand that? I couldn’t possibly abandon my brethren to a dog’s death, now could I?”

This even had Zagan wide-eyed in surprise.

She really is talented when in work mode... This was the ideal solution for the Unification Faction to shave down the number of Zagan’s enemies while protecting the Angelic Knights. It looked like three of the Archangels were rendered powerless. She managed to stop three of them on her own, so that was more than enough effort put in by her. However, the remaining Archangels were still gripping their swords.

“It’s not like I trust you or anything, but I agree with that opinion. We don’t need hindrances here.”

“Kaltiainen?!”

A middle-aged Archangel swung his sword at Chastille. He appeared to be quite skilled, and it took Chastille all she had to keep his attention. However, he wasn’t her only opponent.

“My apologies, but I, Hartonen, do not acknowledge one who is

connected to an Archdemon as my ally.”

A young man slipped to her side and tried to slam the flat of his Sacred Sword into Chastille.

“Whoa there. Why don’t you knights fight like knights and do it one-on-one?”

“Gah!”

Stella kicked the Archangel right in the face before he could do anything. And watching that, Michael held his head with both hands.

“Hey, you! What the hell are you doing when my position’s in such a shaky state?!” Chastille exclaimed.

“Chastille’s my friend. Was the power you gave me meant for ignoring my friends?” Stella inquired.

“Haaah... That damn Zachariel, why choose someone so damn troublesome?” Michael said as he let out a sigh, took off his sword belt, and tossed it at Stella.

“Then give it a go. Paths are meant to be cut open with one’s own strength, right, Zachariel?”

Zagan’s eyes shot open in shock.

Stella’s... the next wielder of that Sacred Sword...? Stella herself also stiffened up with her mouth wide open.

“You’re giving it to me?”

“Yeah. Try it out however you like. Don’t use anything but that sword though, okay?”

This was apparently better than having her use sorcery here. Zagan held back his confusion about all of this and turned a refreshing smile towards Michael.

“Are you not going to fight yourself, Michael?”

“I’m neutral, ya know? In times like these, all of you can do whatever you want.”

As if to prove this, Michael took a box of tobacco from his chest pocket and began smoking. The unification and neutral factions were falsely similar. The difference in action taken by Chastille and Michael demonstrated this full well.

Michael then turned his attention to the three Archangels who had dropped their swords as if suddenly remembering something.

“Oh yeah, you three who failed just now. Sit down on your knees right here. You’ll be restarting your training starting tomorrow.”

The three young Archangels were speechless but timidly followed his orders.

Tch. That damn Andrealphus. I’ll have him properly explain all this afterwards... And as that went on, Stella shouted in a completely out of place, cheerful tone.

“Thanks, teach! I was super pissed at this geezer!”

“...Don’t look down on me, woman!”

“Ahahah! It’s all right. I’m no good with sword, so I’ll hold back. Oh, I guess I can’t really do that since I’m not very skilled, huh? Well, whatever. Let’s do this — Zachariel!”

Stella drew the Sacred Sword while laughing as she usually did and a black flame poured from its blade.

“What?! She really...?! Gaah! Howl — Zadkiel!”

The middle-aged Archangel who was crossing swords with Chastille switched targets over to Stella. In his stead, the Archangel who had called himself Hartonen began fighting Chastille. And those weren’t the only sword fights to begin.

“It’s been a long time, Valjakka.”

“Lord Hyurandell. Why would a man of your caliber... Ugh?!”

“Does it displease you?”

“I can’t possibly forgive you!”

It appeared that the young man named Valjakka had some sort of grudge with Raphael and was locking swords with him.

It seems there are people here who are on par with Chastille and Raphael... The first three knights to drop out looked rather inexperienced. With them, Chastille, Stella, Raphael, and the three they were in combat with, made up nine Sacred Swords.

As for Ginias, it didn’t seem that he had recovered from the shock of being tricked. He was simply standing there, dumbfounded. However, there were twelve Sacred Swords in this room. As for the remaining two...

“Our opponent is an Archdemon. Don’t let your guard down for an instant, Julius.”

“I know, brother.”

Two young men who appeared to be brothers stood before Zagan.

“Nephy, stay a good distance back from me.”

“Yes. Do be careful, Master Zagan.”

“Mm.”

Having her see him off like this felt somewhat fresh, and Zagan’s face unintentionally slackened. The Archangels before him apparently took this as a provocation, and the brothers screamed while their cheeks convulsed with anger.

“Archangel Arvo Juutilainen! Archdemon Zagan! I’ll be taking your head!”

“Archangel Julius Juutilainen! Here I come!”

The brothers named themselves in a stuffy manner and came charging in from both sides at the same time. They got along quite well as siblings and were well coordinated.

Zagan lowered his pipe. It would have been a waste to put it out, seeing as there was still some tobacco left, so Zagan bent his body in a way that avoided their slashes without letting it get extinguished.

“Your swordsmanship isn’t bad. If you accumulate a little more experience, you may be able to reach Michael and Raphael’s level.”

Zagan honestly praised them, which only fanned the brothers’ anger further.

“Don’t make light of us, Archdemon! Flutter — Sandalphon!”

The elder brother called to his Sacred Sword, and a cold chill that felt like it could tear one’s skin poured from his blade as it shined a radiant blue. In fact, it could do exactly that. The skin on Zagan’s cheek froze in an instant, and a small line of blood ran down his face. And there was no way an Archangel’s attack would end at just a scratch.

“With me, Julius!”

“I know! Dance — Gabriel!”

The younger brother’s Sacred Sword let loose a stream of water. A wave of cold and water, and when the two of them combined...

“Hmm, now this is splendid.”

An enormous mass of ice was born, then went to envelop itself around Zagan. He really was glad that he’d had Nephy get away from him.

The mass of ice was wrapping around Zagan and growing in size, looking to crush him within it. To add to that, upon coming into contact with the aura from the Sacred Swords, it was impossible to weave sorcery. It was likely impossible for an average sorcerer to escape this technique.

But they still lack experience. And what Zagan chose to do... was stomp his foot. That was all. The entire treasury shook from that simple action. And underneath his foot was the unstable pile of rubble.

The ice was enveloping the rubble as well, but it didn’t change the fact that his action had introduced foreign substances into the block of ice. By sending a shockwave into those pockets, even the ice would be unable to withstand it. Ice with cracks in it was ever so brittle. So the enormous block of ice began crumbling into pieces.

“We’ve got you now...!”

“Hrm...?”

The shattered ice turned into sharpened blades and rained down on Zagan.

“I see. So this is all one technique which includes having the ice shatter. Well done.”

Even an Archdemon wouldn’t be able to escape this combination from a crushing block of ice to a rain of frozen blades. However, Zagan stomped on the rubble and shattered it to pieces earlier. The fragments were thrown in the air all around him. After finding a sizable piece of rubble within all that, Zagan gave it a good kick.

The stone was about the size of a fist, and it slammed into a blade of ice that was aimed at Zagan's head, changing its course. The blade crashed into another blade, and the stone that he'd originally kicked also ricocheted and slammed into yet another blade. The chain repeated itself again, with blades slamming into stones slamming into blades one after the other right over his head.

Before long, all the blades of ice succumbed to gravity and fell to the ground. Zagan of course started by confirming that Nephy hadn't suffered a single scratch, then he enjoyed another puff from his pipe.

"A wonderful technique. However, it isn't sharp enough to cut an Archdemon."

"No way... Completely unharmed...?"

The brothers were dumbfounded. Zagan didn't suffer a single scratch from what could be considered a shower of blades. The single rock that Zagan had kicked had knocked down every single blade like a rampaging billiard ball.

This would probably be hard for even someone of Kimaris' level to handle completely... He probably would've been fine if he had wrapped his body with sorcery in advance, but it was too late to ward against it now. The only other Archdemon who could come out of this unharmed was Andrealphus, since he could manipulate time.

The reason Zagan had been able to completely break through this technique was because he was a sorcerer who specialized in observing sorcery and imitating it an instant. In other words, he specialized in observing and analyzing the flow of things.

One could say that he was the worst opponent for these two Archangels. And yet, the brothers didn't give up.

"Don't think you've won, Archdemon!"

The older brother, the one who called himself Arvo, fiercely charged in.

Hey now, you'll crash into Nephy if I dodge this! Zagan made sure to stand in a way so that he was covering Nephy behind him this entire time. There was no way he could dodge this attack. That being said, if he punched someone charging at him so defenselessly, he would end up killing them.

"What a stuffy fellow."

And with no other choice, Zagan grasped Arvo's face like a hawk to stop him. He might suffer a serious shock to his neck from this, but he'd have to put up with that much. It should have been quite painful, but Arvo was smiling.

"That... arrogance... has proven... fatal!"

"What?"

Immediately following that, ice began spreading out with Arvo at its center. With Zagan grabbing his face, his arm was swallowed by

the ice before he could even let go. Taking a closer look, the Archangel had stabbed himself with his own Sacred Sword.

Does he plan to take me along with him?

“Now! Do it, Julius!”

“B-Brother...”

“We’ll be able to take down an Archdemon with just our lives! A cheap price to pay!”

“Ugh... Damn it all! Gabriel!”

After hesitating for but a moment, Julius quickly resolved himself to his fate. Arvo had a Sacred Sword thrust through his body already; there was no saving him. The water streaming out of Julius’ sword wrapped around his own body, and a giant spear of water pointed itself directly at Zagan.

He completely ignored all defenses and plunged toward Zagan like a loosed arrow. The swirling vortex of water at the tip felt like it could even pierce through Heaven’s Scale with a direct hit. But most of all, the water current even began swallowing Julius’ body. It was like he was caught between rotating cogs. Even if they somehow managed to defeat Zagan, they would surely never wield swords again.

It was likely that aside from Confession, there wasn’t a single Archangel that was capable of unleashing this powerful of an attack. It could be said to be the ultimate spear. Its only weakness was that if it was dodged, they would be dying in vain. But they managed to overcome this with Arvo’s sacrifice. Not that Zagan would ever choose to dodge this move anyway, seeing as Nephy was behind him. And with such a crisis before him, Zagan simply let out an astonished sigh.

“I approve of your resolve, but you two don’t have enough attachment to your damned lives.”

He then thrust forth his right hand, still holding his pipe.

“Heaven’s Scale Eastern Sky.”

A massive right arm made of Heaven’s Scale manifested at Zagan’s side. Michael, who was sitting on the sidelines while watching everything, whistled in admiration.

“Not bad at all. They got Zagan to use his right arm. You guys should learn from them.”

“What are you saying, Lord Diekmeyer?! Go save the Juutilainens!”

“What do you think this old man can do without a Sacred Sword? Well, just sit there and watch.”

One of the young Archangels clung to Michael for help, but he simply sat there laughing.

Heaven’s Scale was the invincible shield Zagan had created to fight the church.

Unfortunately for you, I never planned to belittle the Sacred Swords...

Zagan had had this prepared the moment he was first confronted with the Archangels. He had simply stopped providing it with mana, and the moment he'd let his mana flow once more, it activated instantly.

And so, the ultimate spear and invincible shield collided. The Eastern Sky grabbed Julius' Sacred Sword. An ear-grating creak rang through the air as cracks ran down the Eastern Sky, but the sorcery known as Heaven's Scale fed on mana and aura to strengthen itself. The damaged portions repaired themselves, and the Sacred Sword lost more and more power. And with a sound like shattering glass, silence spread throughout the room.

The surging current of water from the Sacred Sword came to a stop, and all that was left was the brilliantly shining Eastern Sky. The invincible shield came out on top. Having used up all his strength, Julius fell to his knees. His entire body was covered in bruises and lacerations. It felt like his limbs would tear off at any moment.

"Impossible... We Juutilainens couldn't even manage a single blow when staking our lives on it?"

Arvo was completely taken aback, to which Zagan replied in astonishment.

"You actually did pretty well. I didn't plan on using the Eastern Sky here at all. You may pride yourselves in having forced me to use it."

He then tapped the ice with his pipe. Black flames flew out like fireflies and shattered Arvo's ice. Both Zagan and Arvo were unharmed by the flames. Only the ice was destroyed.

Heaven's Phosphor Will-o'-the-Wisp. I thought the lack of destructive power was a flaw, but it can be used for something like this too, huh?

And as he reevaluated the usefulness of Will-o'-the-Wisp, Zagan grabbed the Sacred Sword that was in Arvo's dying body.

Hm? Nothing's happening. Zagan was prepared to burn his hand, but the Sacred Sword didn't reject him. Well, it was a pleasant miscalculation that he was fine after touching it, so Zagan pulled the Sacred Sword out mercilessly.

"Gak!"

Perhaps thanks to freezing his own body, there was no blood loss from pulling out the sword. Having said that, it surely didn't feel good, and Arvo lost consciousness. Zagan then took the dying Arvo and tossed him over to Nephy.

"Can you heal him, Nephy? It's a bit of a waste for him to die here."

"Yes! Please leave it to me!"

Nephy was tense from all the suspense just now, but her smile had returned wonderfully.

It's difficult to heal wounds from Sacred Swords with sorcery, but

Nephy's mysticism can handle it. He wasn't sure whether a complete recovery was possible, but they could likely keep Arvo from dying. And seeing that conduct from Zagan, Julius raised his voice in bewilderment.

"Why? Why are you saving my brother? No... before that... you should have been able to avoid it!"

Even if he didn't go out of his way to use the Eastern Sky, Zagan could have broken the ice using Will-o'-the-Wisp, taken Nephy, and gotten away from the blow with ease.

After savoring his pipe for a moment, Zagan let out a puff of smoke as he replied.

"Well, first, I have a debt to Chastille. That crybaby is running about getting her Unification Faction or whatever it is going. I can't possibly do something like that in front of her."

The other reason was because he was only here for sightseeing, but if he'd said that, Julius was sure to get angry. The young Archangel then dropped his blade in resignation.

"Hm? All done?"

"Not only did you hold back on us, you even saved my brother. How exactly am I supposed to keep fighting? It's... our loss."

With that, the Juutilainen brothers were rendered powerless. Taking a look around, the others had also brought their fights to a conclusion. Or rather than bringing them to a conclusion, it was more like they had gotten tired of fighting and were watching Zagan in silence.

"So we're done?" Zagan asked as he shrugged his shoulders. "Then I'd like to get going already."

"We're not... done here!"

And the final one to roar... was Ginias.



Having finally come to his senses, Ginias held his Sacred Sword at the ready and stood before Zagan.

"I cannot understand you."

"Hmm, so?"

Ginias gripped the blade of his Sacred Sword and let his blood run as he shouted.

"However, what I must do is clear — Angelic Confession Razieli!"

Zagan spontaneously let out a sigh of admiration.

So there's someone other than Andrealphus who can use that. The difference from Andrealphus' Confession was that Ginias' was made of green armor, and the weapon in its hand wasn't a spear but a sword. The Confession was about twice the boy's size and wielded a two-handed sword even larger than that.

The Confession then pointed its blade at Zagan.

“Cut down sorcerers, defeat the Archdemons. That’s the duty of the Angelic Knights.”

Zagan nodded along, praising his courage.

“That’s correct. If you understand that much, then don’t hesitate. The one standing before you is your enemy.”

Zagan answered him in a composed tone, but he was secretly panicking within.

I need this guy to try his best here or he won’t be able to continue living in the church. At the current rate, this boy would become the one responsible for guiding an Archdemon into the treasury, who also happened to be the primary culprit behind its collapse. It wasn’t something for an Archdemon like Zagan to be worrying about, but he really couldn’t help but feel a little responsible for it.

“Why would a man like you...?!” Ginias yelled as he ground his teeth.

“...Hmph, now that I think of it, she said the exact same thing to me before.”

Zagan reflexively strained a smile. Chastille had screamed the same words when he first met her. It seemed he resembled her in more ways than one.

Or maybe that’s the type of person the Sacred Swords prefer? If that were the case, the ones who were fighting them in rage earlier may have also possessed similar facets to them. And as Zagan mused over such thoughts, Ginias held his sword at the ready.

“Head Archangel Ginias Galahad II! Archdemon Zagan, I challenge you!”

“Yeah, come at me. Show me your power.”

The green Confession brought down its greatsword, and Zagan held up the Eastern Sky to stop the blow.

Andrealphus’ power is far greater... It may have been pitiable to compare him to a monster who wielded the power of both a Sacred Sword and Archdemon, but that’s the assessment Zagan gave his strike. However, he then realized that Ginias was not there beneath the Confession.

“Hmm?”

Zagan turned around and found Ginias already swinging his sword.

“Sing — Raziel!”

Wind blew violently from his blade. This was apparently the Sacred Sword’s power. Several sorceries that Zagan had prepared were blown away with ease. He was now in a defenseless state, unable to use sorcery. In this respect, the battle before him overlapped with the time he’d seen Alshiera training in the castle.

How would I fight someone faster than the invocation of sorcery? It wasn't something he could consciously move against.

"Huh?"

Ginias was the one to let loose a killing blow, but he flipped over and was now rolling about in midair. Zagan grabbed the back of Ginias' wrist, threw off his center of gravity, and chucked him away. Ginias tumbled to the ground and had a look on his face that made it clear he had no idea what had happened. However, Zagan didn't look at him with a victorious smile.

"...In the end, I ended up using arts in the final moment... I can't really complain about Decarabia anymore."

The first technique Zagan had learned to survive with was arts. He was thankful that Marc had taught him this, but there was nothing pleasant about using it here. And with a sigh, he turned his back to Ginias.

"Hey, that's enough. It's my loss."

Seeing that Zagan was completely disappointed with himself, Ginias yelled in anger.

"Do you mean to mock me?!"

"Aah, no, it's a personal matter," Zagan replied as he scratched his head. Then he continued by saying, "An Archdemon relying on power other than sorcery is like they're denying their own sorcery, right? That's why you win."

This was something Zagan fussed over. If he couldn't maintain his principles, then he was nothing more than the vanquished.

"...Don't screw with me..." Ginias said with a trembling voice. "What do you mean you lost? Do you think you're that strong?"

"That's right, what of it?" Zagan arrogantly replied, to which Ginias returned a sneer.

"How can someone who can't even affirm themselves be strong?! You are weak. Pitifully weak! Very well. Tuck your tail and run. Cutting down such a pitiful Archdemon is nothing to boast of."

He might have been right on the mark. That was why it was somewhat effective in irritating Zagan. However, it was still only enough to change his opinion from, "I tricked you, so I'll let you save face" to, "I guess I can kill you." But in this case, it was the difference between life and death for Ginias.

That's because Zagan simply decided not to kill anyone in front of Nephy. It wasn't his creed not to kill. The only reason for going out of his way to keep the Juutilainen brothers alive was because having people die on his fake honeymoon would leave a bad aftertaste. That's all there was to it.

Zagan simply thought of it as somewhat bothersome to deal with them without killing them. That was just the difference in terms of

ability between them.

Whether I like it or not, he may not get it since he's a brat. And taking one moment to think it over once more, he decided to give Ginias a single warning.

"Are you maybe under the assumption that I don't kill people? If so, that's a major misunderstanding."

"You can't kill people. Someone as weak as you will run away even from killing others."

The air froze, and Michael stiffly raised his voice.

"Hey, cut it out there Ginias. I don't have Zachariel with me, I won't be able to help, ya know?"

"Looks like you're a little late to stop them."

This boy likely did not intend to beg for his life, and Zagan simply found him tiresome and was planning on ending things quickly by killing him. Zagan had turned his back on him already, but he turned to face him once more.

"I don't really care about your reasons, but I don't understand your actions. I'm telling you I'll withdraw. Well, I suppose your precious treasury is in this state, and you'd end up with two Archdemons getting away at once. The church's honor will be able to maintain itself, right? Why are you going out of your way to hasten your death?"

Zagan could at least understand the Juutilainens being willing to give up their lives. They thought Zagan was aiming for their treasure, and their honor had been smashed. But above all else, there was hope that they could defeat him by doing so.

However, their honor was able to maintain itself now, and the difference in power between them was clear. More importantly, Zagan had already said that he would leave. There was no meaning in dying here, and the result wouldn't change even if he won.

Ginias ground his teeth loudly.

"Are you sorcerers unable to even understand this much? Giving up on a fight, yielding over victory... What would you call this if not humiliation?!"

Zagan nodded in understanding. Even though he'd shown his power, he'd never launched an attack of his own. The Juutilainen brothers' injuries were self-inflicted. One couldn't even call it a fight.

"Hmm. You certainly have a point. Sorry about that."

Zagan would probably do the same if someone had made such a fool of him. He ended up being unable to understand the feelings of the weak before he knew it. Zagan was in the wrong for this. Well, Zagan had gained power because he hated the thought of becoming such a weakling, so it could be said to be a perfectly natural outcome.

That's why Zagan decided to wield his full power to crush this

boy, as a form of apology.

It'll leave a bad aftertaste, but I guess I'll accept this as my responsibility. He would have to apologize to Nephy later. And as a minimal show of pity, Zagan made his declaration.

"Then here I come. At least try to keep your eyes open until the very end."

"Co—!"

Ginias couldn't even say that one word. Everything was over by the time Zagan swung his arm. The Eastern Sky formed its hand like a blade and crushed both the Confession and Ginias altogether.

Just how many people were able to perceive that motion? It was probably just Michael and maybe one other. Even Chastille and Stella were holding their breaths and completely stiffened up.

However, there was one person there who slowly got up.

"...Good grief. It's not like you at all to kill a child in a fight like this."

It was a voice like a tumbling bell, belonging to none other than the one who had obstinately refused to do anything in this grand melee: Oberon.

She had Ginias in her arms. She apparently covered for him at the last second. However, there was no way she had gotten out of the strike from the Eastern Sky unharmed. A crack ran down her helmet, and it split in two.

"Huh? That face is..." Chastille muttered.

The face revealed from beneath the helmet was that of a young girl in her teens, just as her voice implied. Her large slanted eyes had azure pupils, she had little pink lips, and her hair, now released from her helmet, went down to her waist. Pure white hair. And her ears, just like Nephy's, were pointed to a tip. The ears of an elf.

I couldn't stop it. Zagan knew that Oberon had jumped in. However, after having launched a strike from the Eastern Sky at full force, he had been unable to stop the strike.

Even as a trickle of blood ran down her forehead, she laughed curiously.

"However, the way you've grown angry over something so trivial truly is human. I rather like it."

Zagan was unsure of how he should reply for a moment, and just as he was about to open his mouth...

"You've fiiiiinally showed an opening."

That filthy voice belonged to none other than Bifrons, who everyone thought had already left.

"Crap!"

By the time anyone realized this, the mithril staff had crumbled away like sand.

What a pitiful state of affairs... Zagan ground his teeth, but Oberon shook her head like it wasn't a big deal.

"We're fine here. In any case, get going already. Things have gotten a little out of hand."

She then picked up the dirty broom that had fallen near the pedestal.

"...Sorry. I'll leave this place to you."

Zagan bowed to Oberon, then turned to Raphael. He had also stopped his blade, and upon noticing Zagan's gaze, he returned his Sacred Sword to his artificial arm.

Zagan walked over to Nephy's side. It seemed she had treated both Arvo and Julius while she was at it. The Juutilainen brothers were both laid out by her side.

"Shall we?"

"Yes."

Zagan stretched out his hand, and Nephy settled herself in his arm while Raphael followed behind them.

"Nephy, what would you have thought if I had killed Ginias there?"

"I would have found it pitiable, and a bit sad, but..." She then leaned against him. "If it's something you're worried about, Master Zagan, then I shall carry the burden with you. So it's all right."

I really can't beat her. And before leaving he took one last look at Ginias.

A weakling who can't affirm himself... huh?

He was an irritatingly impertinent brat, but that statement was so on the mark that he couldn't refute it at all.

Zagan looked down at his own hand.

Arts were a power he'd been granted during his childhood, which he had discarded upon becoming a sorcerer. Was it really all right to rely on them after becoming an Archdemon?

Having lost his temper at having that nail hit right on the head was surely his loss. However, some would say he was better off that way.

And with a slightly bitter aftertaste to end their sweet journey, the curtains came down on Zagan and Nephy's fake honeymoon.

Epilogue

“It’s rare to see you out of the shadows, Barbatos.”

A few days later, back in Kianoides. Barbatos was lounging around on a sofa in Chastille’s office.

“Huh? Even I’ll come out when I need to take a crap.”

“...You really would be better off learning about the concept of tact.”

Chastille looked at him in astonishment but didn’t say anything else, seeing that this was just the same as usual.

“You done cleaning up?” Barbatos asked as he stifled a yawn.

“Yeah. The Juutilainen brothers managed to survive. They’ll likely get reinstated to the Archangels, too. Lord Michael... well, he was criticized, but he’ll surely slip by one way or another.”

“And that ass, Decarabia?”

“That’s the complicated part... Stella showed she could use Zachariel’s power during that fight, meaning she was acknowledged as the Sacred Sword’s wielder. However, they can’t possibly take it away from Lord Michael either.”

“So they’re basically sharing?”

“That’s how it is. Both Stella and Lord Michael are being called Zachariel’s Archangel.”

In general, Sacred Swords only chose their next wielder after their previous one had died.

“Well, he is an Archdemon, so it’s probably some kinda setup, right?”

“How many Archdemons are loitering around inside the church...?”

Chastille had somehow managed to keep it to herself during the incident, but it was still perplexing.

Well, I guess her little faction got a bit bigger thanks to that. He wasn’t sure how much of this was calculated, but because of Zagan’s declaration of owing a debt to Chastille, it was proved that the Unification Faction had a certain amount of influence over an Archdemon.

Having directly confronted Zagan, the Juutilainen brothers even showed adoration for the Unification Faction. In short, this was a result worth celebrating for Barbatos, who was entrusted with guarding Chastille.

Watching that ass Zagan get talked down to like that was a masterpiece too! He then recalled that he didn't hear what had happened to the one who had done so.

"So? What happened to that brat?"

"Ginias? Setting aside his thoughts on Zagan, he lost without being able to do a single thing. I think it will take some time for him to recover."

Ginias won from the perspective of damaging Zagan's self-respect, but the difference in their actual abilities was like heaven and earth.

That ass... He's been making leaps and bounds lately. That last strike he showed them was several times faster than Barbatos would have expected. If he wasn't fixated on devouring sorcery and had used that right away against Andrealphus, he probably would have overwhelmed him. It was curious how few people had realized that sooner.

Those were the same movements as Decarabia... He dropped his center of gravity, planted both feet firmly on the ground, pulled back his left hand and brought his right straight down. Those were the exact same arts that Decarabia used. It was the power that Zagan had rejected as being something shameful to use.

This proved that if Zagan used it with Heaven's Scale, modeled after his own fist, nothing would be able to deal with it. Even Alshiera likely wouldn't be able to deal with it using her speed if he used that power. It was a sorcerer's principle to use everything at their disposal, so it truly was foolish of him.

In any case, Zagan had gotten even stronger. Barbatos would have to build up his strength even more if he hoped to kill him in his sleep.

"Haaah, what to do...?"

That was one of the reasons Barbatos was just lounging about here in exhaustion. And Chastille once more looked at him in astonishment.

"Are you planning to pick a fight with Zagan again?"

"Well, it is kinda impossible... How'd you know that anyway?"

"How long do you think I've known you? I can tell by the look on your face."

Barbatos covered his face in a fluster. Did it show on his face so much that even the crybaby could tell? If so, that was a major issue.

Actually, what is this? Am I feeling embarrassed? It was all Chastille's fault for saying things like Zagan did with a straight face. And as he agonized over this in confusion, Chastille changed the topic.

"How about things on your end? You said you had an idea of who the traitor among the Archangels was, right?"

"Hah? That's been dealt with already."

"Huh?! D-Did you kill them?"

"Hmm, he's probably still alive? I don't really care."

“Well, you should! Explain it properly!”

“Haaah... What a pain.”

And after yawning back at Chastille, Barbatos recalled what had happened immediately after the incident in Raziel.



“Damn you... Damn you! Damn you, Raphael! You traitor! I believed in you!”

Valjakka walked through the moonlit streets of the Holy City while cursing in anger. A proud Archangel had been reduced to nothing more than an Archdemon’s hound. Especially one like Raphael, who was popular among Angelic Knights like Valjakka and Kaltiainen due to his mercilessness.

He was sure Raphael would sooner have killed himself than capitulate to an Archdemon. That’s why the young Angelic Knights continued fighting under such assumptions. This all made the shock of Raphael’s betrayal even greater.

Two Archdemons known as Zagan and Bifrons broke into the treasury, and Raphael’s betrayal was made clear. That in itself was an irrecoverable shock to all the Angelic Knights who had witnessed it, which is why Valjakka was wandering the streets with a bottle of liquor in hand. He had to drown himself in alcohol to accept such a truth.

And as he held back his urge to vomit, Valjakka suddenly came to a stop.

“Hrm? Is that Ginias?”

Ginias was also quite the pitiful boy. He had been deceived by Zagan’s crafty words and ended up guiding him right to the treasury. After challenging the Archdemon to take responsibility for that, he was completely and thoroughly defeated.

Archdemon Zagan... can he really be defeated? Even Valjakka, who’d served as an Archangel for over ten years, had his confidence shaken by what he saw. As Ginias’ elder, it was appropriate to encourage him while he was down. And just as he’d cheered himself up with that sense of responsibility...

“Oops, my bad.”

It seemed some drunk bumped into him from the side.

“It’s fine. Be more care...ful?”

Just as he replied, he realized something was out of place.

How did this man get so close to me...? Even if he was drunk, someone managed to step within the range of an Archangel without him noticing. And as he was about to turn to face the man, he sensed something out of place in his abdomen.

“What... Huh?”

As he looked down, he saw a dagger deeply planted in his stomach.

“U-UWA—OMPH?!”

Just as he tried to scream, a piece of wood was jammed in his mouth. Standing before him was a young man with a sickly face. He had a countless number of amulets dangling from his neck. Valjakka could tell that this was a sorcerer at a glance.



“Shut your trap. I’ve got a headache from a lack of sleep. Don’t squawk like that. If you get it, then blink. Just once.”

Who is this man...?! Valjakka tried to resist, but he suddenly realized the situation he was in. The thing that defined him, his Sacred Sword, wasn’t at his side. It was jammed in his mouth by the hilt. The dagger that he usually carried wasn’t on his belt. It was lodged in his stomach. And above all else, even though he could feel something stabbed into his abdomen, he terrifyingly couldn’t feel any pain.

And now, having come to a full understanding of just how cornered he was, he began to tremble violently. After blinking once in a panic, the man before him stifled a yawn.

“Ah, how’d it go? Oh yeah... You’re the one who isolated the crybaby and leaked information to Shere Khan, right?”

Valjakka shook with a start, and the sorcerer continued speaking while languidly scratching his head.

“Frankly, I think it’d be way easier just to kill you. But my employer requested we give you a simple warning. Well, I guess the crybaby will be suspected if I kill you here.”

Valjakka had no idea who this crybaby the sorcerer kept referring to was. And ignoring his confusion, the sorcerer pulled a small piece of paper from his pocket. It seemed to be some sort of memo, and he began reading it aloud while clearly finding it tiresome.

“Anyways, here’s your warning. Umm, let’s see... First. You’re prohibited from taking any action that would put Chastille at a disadvantage. Second. You’re prohibited from taking any action that would put the other Archangels at a disadvantage as long as you don’t violate the above. Third. Devote yourself to the people, as long as you don’t violate the above. So it says.”

The sorcerer cackled.

“Well ain’t that nice? All you gotta do is live a nice and clean life. Just be a nice little church boy. Oh yeah, one more thing. This is just a warning, so you got no obligation to follow along. Meaning it’s fine for you to ignore it.”

Valjakka had no idea what was so funny. The sorcerer began laughing heartily and slapping his thighs as he tightened his grip on the dagger.

“Anyway, this here is my sorcery. This dagger is passing through your stomach. It both exists and doesn’t. Oh, looks like you don’t get it. Basically, it only half exists in this world. Kinda like a ghost.”

With that, the sorcerer twisted the dagger and pushed it up toward Valjakka’s heart. There was no pain, but he could feel a foreign object moving through his body. The feeling was driving him

mad.

“Whoa there, don’t move a muscle. This is quite the delicate sorcery. Messing it up will mean death. For you. Get it?”

The dagger went from his heart to his neck, and from his neck to his face, where it stopped, piercing into his head through his brow.

“So, here’s your problem. This thing sticking outta your head will materialize just from me being in a bad mood. The same goes if I croak. The moment the sorcery is undone, your head will split in two. So if you go and ignore the warning I went outta my way to give you... well, I won’t be in a good mood.”

Valjakka couldn’t even breathe from the sheer terror. A shamefully wet feeling spread out from his crotch, and a nasty smell shrouded over him. The sorcerer plainly grimaced upon noticing this.

“...Don’t piss yourself. How pathetic. Well, you do get it then, right? So, next.”

There’s more?! He almost wanted to beg this man to kill him if this were to continue. However, at the same time, he knew that if he opened his mouth now, he’d be begging for his life.

And as the sorcerer coldly looked down on Valjakka...

“Hey, you’ve known the crybaby for a while, right? Oh, you can talk now.”

The sorcerer pulled the Sacred Sword from Valjakka’s mouth. And holding back his urge to vomit, Valjakka replied.

“C-Crybaby? Wh-Who’s that?”

“I’m talking about Chastille, you idiot. You don’t even know that?”

There’s no way he would. Valjakka trembled in anger from the irrationality that was thrust before him.

“Th-That’s right. I’ve known her... since we were children!”

The sorcerer nodded in satisfaction.

“...Then answer me. Um... she got... a favorite food or something?”

The sorcerer making a villainous expression seemed to be setting Chastille as his next target. He was telling Valjakka to sell out the girl that he thought of as his own little sister.

I’ve already sold her out once! Like that matters! So Valjakka spoke of everything he could think of.

“Sh-She really cherishes stuffed bears! A-Also, the food in her house was terrible! So even slightly good food gets her excited! And... and... she’s extremely open around children! She especially likes anything cute!”

Even Valjakka was wondering what on earth he was saying, but the sorcerer took out a pen from his pocket in a hurry.

“H-Hang on! I need to write this down. Uh, she has stuffed bears?

Huh? Never seen any... Also, good food? Guess she likes sweets... Shit, what a blind spot. And cute things, huh? As for kids... Well, whatever.”

He was talking like a man trying to buy a present for the girl he liked for some reason, but Valjakka believed this to be some dreadful scheme of a sorcerer and didn't suspect a thing at all. The man then pulled out some sort of metal ornament. It was likely some tool of sorcery, though it looked like a hair ornament modeled after a butterfly wing.

“Last question. Do you think this matches the crybaby's taste?”

“I-I don't... Wait! I mean, I think she'll like it! I'm sure it suits her!”

“Th-That so? She'll like it? Mmm... Looks like my choice was right. Mmm...”

The sorcerer began nodding his head repeatedly in relief for some reason. He then looked at Valjakka as if he had forgotten he was there.

“Oh, I'm done with you. You can leave now.”

He let go of the dagger, and it fell to the ground with a clunk. Though, the handle had no blade, and Valjakka could still feel a foreign object in his head.

I-I'm being spared? He fell to his knees, while the sorcerer began sinking away into his own shadow.

“P-Please wait! I was threatened by Shere Khan! Wh-What do I do?!”

It began five years ago, during the rare species hunt. The company of Angelic Knights Valjakka led encountered Archdemon Shere Khan and was annihilated. That was also when Chastille's older brother died. However, as the wielder of a Sacred Sword, Valjakka was kept alive at Shere Khan's convenience in exchange for delivering him information from within the church.

After five years, he thought Shere Khan had died and he was released from his obligation. And yet, he appeared once more. That's why he'd guided the twins who called themselves his emissaries into the treasury, and why he'd worked to isolate Chastille to weaken Zagan's influence. The sorcerer looked completely exasperated, almost as if he was looking at trash.

“Like I care. You'll die either way, so just pick whichever way you wanna go.”

“Wh-Why?! Why is Raphael forgiven while I have to go through all this?!”

That's what he couldn't understand the most. Even though he was being reduced to such a miserable state, why was Raphael trusted like he was the right-hand man of an Archdemon? Both of them were

defeated by an Archdemon, so why were they treated so differently?

"It's a difference in... what'd you guys call it? Chivalrous spirit, ain't it? Not that I'm one to talk about that crap."

And with that, the sorcerer vanished without taking another look back at Valjakka, who was left sobbing in shame.



Back to the present, there was one other thing that had Barbatos exhausted.

I got intel on her tastes, but how do I hand this over? He had the butterfly hair ornament in his pocket. Over ten days had passed since he'd gotten it. There was surely something wrong with him for worrying over this to begin with. And the more self aware he was of it, the harder it got to hand it over.

With no way of knowing of Barbatos' suffering, Chastille gazed at the clock as she muttered.

"I think it's about time for Kuroka's treatment to start. I hope it goes well..."

"Aah, Zagan and his elf are doing the healing, was it? Well, won't it just work out?"

To put it bluntly, Barbatos didn't really care what happened to the cat lady. She was brimming with bloodthirst any time she saw him, so he would even prefer if she just stayed over at Zagan's castle while she was there and settle down. Nephteros was over there with her too, so the church was rather quiet today.

In short, this was the best opportunity to hand Chastille her present. That's why Barbatos had come out of the shadows and was in a fluster.

"You're right. I need to believe in her as her friend."

Chastille seemed to be trying to persuade herself, but she looked restless and fidgety while sitting at her office desk.

"Hey crybaby, if you gotta take a piss then you're better off going now."

"Even I'll get angry you know?"

"Hah? You don't have to? Then what's got you all fidgety?"

After having that pointed out to her, Chastille's face suddenly turned red.

"Th-That's, um... haven't you... noticed anything?"

"Huh?"

Barbatos sat up on the sofa and straightened himself up. He then took another look at Chastille.

"You've got a new medal on your lapel?"

"Huh? Yeah. It was for my deeds during the defense of Raziel the other... Not that!"

Apparently, his guess was wrong. He couldn't see anything else about the way she was dressed, so he stood up and took a closer look at her face.

"Then... the string you're using to tie up your hair is different from usual?"

"The one I usually use just happened to snap this morning, so... W = wait, why can you tell?"

"I mean, I can tell that much from being stuck with you every day, right?"

If Zagan, or any of the Angelic Knights for that matter, were around, they'd surely answer, "Like anyone could tell." However, they were the only two in this room, so Chastille simply touched her hair in a fluster.

"I-I see. So you can tell because we've spent so much time together..."

It was like she was relieved, and surprised. Her tone was quite complicated. She then suddenly shook both her hands in front of her.

"Ah, wrong! Why don't you notice the scent when you can tell stuff like that?!"

"Scent?"

Chastille stood and bent over her desk, and Barbatos got even closer. Her eyes were twirling about in circles as she raised a shrill voice.

"I-I mean, when I asked you if I smelled sweaty last time, you brushed it off in a weird way! S-So, um, I borrowed perfumed oil from Neph, and, and..."

"Huh? Now that you mention it, you kinda smell sweet, huh?"

"D-D-D-D-D-Don't sniff me, you idiot!"

"Ugh!"

Chastille thrust him back with all her strength, and Barbatos tumbled back over onto the couch.

Why'd she flip out on me?

Seeing Barbatos flip head over heels so splendidly, even Chastille turned pale.

"Oh, uh, s-sorry... I didn't mean to."

He didn't really get it, but this likely meant there was still some female sensibility left within this amazon. That was surely something to be happy about. Probably. Barbatos let out a sigh and sat back up.

"So, you've been trying to up your charm?"

"I-I haven't thrown away my sense of being a woman or any— Huh?"

Chastille averted her gaze and tried to make an excuse when a metal ornament was placed snugly in her hand.

"If you're trying to look more charming, then at least wear

something like this.”

“What...? Uhhh, you’re giving it to me? Why?”

“Huh? Well, ’cause I saw a real hottie wearing one the other day!”

“Why are you getting angry?”

Chastille was confused by his unreasonable anger, but the flow of their conversation was the same as usual. She then put the hair ornament on where her hair was bundled up.

“How is it?”

“...Not bad, I guess?”

“If you’re saying that, then I’m sure it suits me. Heehee.”

“Quit twisting my words!”

The season had completely passed, so he couldn’t get Chastille to notice that this was a present for Alshire Imera, but she took out a hand mirror and smiled as she looked at it.

Well, whatever. I managed to hand it over. Looks like she likes it, too... Seeing that smile of hers was reward enough in his mind.



“I’ll be in your care.”

Around the same time, in the throne room of Zagan’s castle. The day to treat Kuroka’s eyes had come. Shax was standing by her side, and the two of them were tightly squeezing each other’s hands. Other than them and Nephy, who was doing the treatment, Zagan, Nephteros, and Raphael were all present in the room.

Nephy quietly took a few deep breaths and sat down in front of Kuroka. In the end, she was unable to find any other means than to depend on mysticism.

It’s all right. Master Zagan even took me out for a change of pace. Nephy’s body stiffened up from the tension.

“...Are you okay? You’re white as a sheet.”

“I’m fine, Nephteros.”

Zagan was of course right next to her watching over her attentively. She was in peak condition. All that was left was to believe in herself. Nephy suppressed her rapidly beating heart and gathered her resolve.

“Then let’s begin.”

The essence of mysticism was prayer. It was a technique where one prayed to the countless spirits and waited for them to be granted. That was why Nephy threw away all hesitation and earnestly prayed. And yet...

Will the spirits really answer me? This power wasn’t one she acquired because she wanted it. That’s why she never tried to properly face it. And yet, if she only relied on it at times like these, would the spirits truly answer her so conveniently? Such doubts welled up

within her for but an instant. Nephy drove out her weak self from her heart in the next moment and focused on her prayer.

However, that instant of hesitation gradually encroached on her mysticism. Her chest grew cold, then...

"That's not how you do it. You need to direct your prayers within yourself."

A voice like a tumbling bell resounded in the air. Nephy was taken aback by this and opened her eyes when she noticed a girl with white hair was right there next to her. The girl wearing the armor of an Angelic Knight placed both her hands atop Nephy's.

"There is no god in the world. If there is, it only exists within you. That's why you direct your prayers within yourself. Believe in yourself. That's the way to use mysticism."

This girl was someone Nephy had only met once or twice, and this one instant was the first time she'd seen her face. And yet, her words resonated within Nephy's heart to a surprising extent.

"Right!"

I need to believe in myself... Nephy stayed by Zagan's side, she made friends with Chastille and Manuela, she gained a daughter in Foll, and she even had a sister, Nephteros. She was loved by many. And so, she prayed. She prayed that she wouldn't feel shame in being loved and faced forward.

I see. That's the part of me that I want to believe in... Nephy wanted to be someone suitable for all the love she received. Surely, that Nephy would not stumble over something like this. She would surely heal Kuroka's eyes perfectly without leaving any after-effects. The mysticism that was beginning to waver stabilized and became calm like the surface of a lake. The throne room sank into silence.

"I-Is it over?" Shax timidly asked.

And after Nephy nodded, just as Kuroka was about to open her eyes...

"Oh, please wait a moment."

Nephy stopped her, then turned Kuroka toward Shax.

The first person Kuroka should see, and the first person she should have see her, is this man... He looked flustered for a moment, but he immediately worked up his courage. Then, he kneeled before Kuroka and lined his sights with hers.

"Okay, Kurosuke."

Kuroka's cat ears quivered with a twitch. Her red eyes were then slowly revealed. And upon reflecting the exhausted young man, large tears formed within them. Unable to bear it any longer, Kuroka covered her face.

"H-How'd it go...?"

"I can... see... It's still a little blurry. But I can properly... see your

face,” Kuroka said as she returned a small nod to Shax.

“Ah—! Thank goodness.”

“Eep?”

Faced with Kuroka’s heartfelt smile, Shax embraced her without hesitation. And as a scruffy feeling scratched against her face, she timidly wrapped her arms around his back. Behind them, Raphael seemed to be trying his best to endure something and was gripping his arm so hard it felt like he would tear it right off. However, Nephy didn’t have the spare energy to ask him what was wrong.

I managed to heal her... And as Nephy gazed over that unbelievable scene, Zagan plopped his hand on her shoulder.

“You did well, Nephy.”

“...Thank you.”

Nephy was so happy from being praised that her tears began to flow.

“Congratulations, Kuroka. And good work, Nephelia.”

Nephteros also praised her with a smile, but Nephy’s gaze was already affixed on the girl standing still next to Zagan. It was precisely because of her advice that Nephy’s mysticism had succeeded.

“Um, thank you very much. Lady Oberon... right?”

She wasn’t wearing her helmet today, so Nephy asked to confirm. As she did, Zagan looked somewhat troubled, while Nephteros was astonished.

“Nephelia, Big Bro gave you a pendant, didn’t he?”

“A pendant?”

It was true that she’d received a mithril pendant from Zagan at one point. It was back when they were in the city at the bottom of the ocean. He’d told her it was a memento from her mother. Nephy pulled up her pendant from her chest and popped it open, revealing a single picture. It was a portrait of an elf with her child. The child was supposedly Nephy, and the words “To my beloved daughter” were engraved within. But the face of her mother was the most startling fact... it was the very same one as the girl before her.

“...Huh?”

She couldn’t keep up, so her mind went blank. Zagan then urged the girl in front of her forward.

“Nephy, allow me to introduce you. This is Titania Nimueh-Oberon. She also currently goes by the name Orias, but... she’s your mother.”

“Mo...ther...?”

Oberon smiled with a troubled expression on her face.



“I don’t think I have the right to be called that after all this time, but that is our relation by blood, yes.”

Nephy had no idea how to respond. Nephteros had once said that her mother was alive, but Nephy didn’t even understand the concept of family before meeting Zagan, so she didn’t know how to regard her. She looked up at Zagan for help, and though he looked a little troubled, he eventually smiled and answered her.

“I’ve never even met my own parents, but she seems to feel the same way about you that you and I do about Foll.”

After worrying and worrying even more about how to put it, he ended up stating it exactly as it was, leaving Nephy with a smile of her own. She then finally faced Oberon once more.

“Um, I thought my mother would be somewhat older.”

Oberon looked down at her own figure.

“This is how I looked when I gave birth to you. I thought this way would be easier to understand...”

Nephy vaguely felt that her mother would be someone terrifying, but she looked truly anxious and didn’t show the slightest hint of rejection on her face.

“Even if you suddenly tell me that you’re my mother, I don’t have a real feeling of what that means. So, um... I’d be happy... if you could teach me that... from now on.”

Nephy somehow managed to put her feelings into words, and Oberon’s eyes shot wide open when she heard the unexpected answer.

“I came here planning to be struck by you, though...”

“Do you think I’ve grown into a person who would do such a thing?”

And having that thrown back at her, Oberon formed a strained smile.

“I see. We certainly don’t know each other, do we?”

“Yes. That’s why, um... I’d like to know you more... Right, Nephteros?”

“Ah...! Well, I suppose so, Nephelia.”

Nephteros, who had a worried look all this time, finally smiled. Nephy wasn’t sure whether this was the correct choice. However, just like Foll had accepted her through all her fumbling, the three of them surely had no choice but to accept each other as they fumbled along as well.

Oberon then held out a broom hesitantly.

“Take this.”

“This?”

It looked vaguely familiar.

Oh, right. This was the broom that was in the Holy City’s treasury... It

was the one Oberon had picked up after the staff was taken.

“This is Azazel’s Staff. It’s something I used when I killed Archdemon Orias.”

Both Zagan and Nephteros stared at the broom in shock.

“Huh? *This* was the staff?”

“Sh-Should it really be called a staff?”

Oberon shrugged her shoulders.

“I don’t know the reason for its name. But it is quite useful, you know? It makes mysticism and celestial mysticism easier to use. And look, you can even use it to fly.”

Oberon began trying to explain things in a fluster. She then held the broom sideways and sat on it, and she mysteriously began floating in the air.

“Oh, a witch like this showed up in one of the picture books I read to Foll.”

“A witch...? Well, that’s not wrong, but do you have any other examples? This is the first thing I’m giving my daughter, you know?”

The tip of Oberon’s ears suddenly turned red, and Zagan pinched his brow as if a headache was coming.

“...Sorry, but could you return to your usual form? This is throwing me off.”

“Unlike Gremory, even her tone changes, huh?”

Nephteros was also shrinking back, having a hard time accepting it as well.

And with that first meeting between mother and daughter going on, Shax and Kuroka whispered to each other just a step away.

“Seems like we should excuse ourselves.”

“You’re right... But... Lady Nephy looks so happy. I’m a little relieved.”

Kuroka had only recently given her final farewell to her own mother, so she replied in a truly happy yet tearful voice. And just as the two stood up, something came tumbling out of Shax’s pocket.

“Oh crap—”

“What’s this?”

The moment Shax froze, Kuroka picked up the object that fell to the floor. And that was... a pair of underwear. Women’s underwear. And scattered around it... was the clothing that Kuroka usually wore.

Now that Nephy thought of it, she hadn’t been wearing it lately.

So... is that Kuroka’s...?

Shortly after, Kuroka appeared to realize it was her underwear. She began to tremble violently in place with tears in her eyes, her face turned red, and her two tails stood on end.

“Wait... H-Huh? Why? This? Mine...?”

“Wait, you’re wrong. Calm down, Kurosuke. This is, um, right,

that,” Shax mumbled those words, turned pale, and what eventually came out of his mouth was... “I-I’ve been taking proper care of it as research material.”

“MYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

Kuroka put all her strength in her claws and began to tear Shax apart. She never thought she would see the light again. And despite thinking this, immediately after regaining her sight, the benefactor she idolized had her underwear on his person. None could blame her.

“M-Master Zagan! Please don’t look!”

Nephy suddenly blocked Zagan’s sight with both her hands.

“I get that, but someone stop Raphael. Shax will die.”

“S-Stop that, what are you doing?!”

After turning her focus to Raphael, Nephy spotted Nephteros clinging to Raphael by the waist, desperately trying to stop him. It didn’t appear to be doing much, though.

“Don’t stop me, Lady Nephteros. This is beyond what a parent can permit.”

“...When you put it like that, it becomes harder to stop you.”

Oberon agreed with Raphael’s reasoning and hesitated to stop him. Her miraculous reunion with her daughter had become quite a mess, but at least Nephy was smiling. However, a certain thought passed her mind.

What manner of people are Master Zagan’s parents, I wonder...? She couldn’t help but be curious, both as a parent and as a daughter.

Afterword

It's been a long time, everyone. I have come to deliver *An Archdemon's Dilemma: How to Love Your Elf Bride Volume 9*. My name is Fuminori Teshima.

This time, we've shaken off Granny Gremory and eloped! However, obviously, our couple has no idea what to talk about when they're all alone! And so, we've got married couple play, flirting, sneaking into a secret treasury, and fighting with the angry Angelic Knights! But the main topic at hand is Nephry and Orias' reunion along with Kuroka's eyes being healed!

By the way, I know I said I'd be careful not to make these volumes any thicker. But, well, I lied.

So, sorry. As you can see, it's quite thick. I really did do my best to shave down as many pages as I could. I had stuff like Zagan and Raphael loitering around in front of Orias' house, and what happened between Foll and Alshiera, and what happened to Dexia and Aristella, and all sorts of things, but we've got a lot of good things coming up too, so it all got cut entirely.

Still, despite all that, I think I managed to progress all the things that came up in the previous volume.

Let's stop talking about the excess here and move on to two announcements!

First is the launch of volume 3 of the manga version! This one has the "Guess who?" scene from volume 2. We've also got a raffle for an adorable acrylic keychain, so everyone please buy your entries!

Second announcement! A drama CD for *Elf Bride* has been announced! Yay! We're going to hear Zagan and Nephry talk! The drama CD is going to cover some things from before meeting Marc, so there's tons of stuff to focus on.

It's actually my first time writing a script for a drama CD, so I was quite worried. As a result, the bath scene that I never actually wrote in the books ended up being the longest part.

Other than that, well, it's not like I'm out of work, but I still can't report on any of it. I think it'll start trickling out soon enough in 2020. Can't say if that'll be before the next *Elf Bride* volume, though.

Now then, allow me to offer my gratitude to everyone who has assisted me.

To my chief editor, K, who saw the number of pages this time and

took my manuscript without any complaints. To the illustrator, COMTA, who also drew some lovely new costumes for us (the date outfit was super cute). To the chief editor at Comic Fire. To everyone involved with the cover design, proofreading, publicity, and such. To everyone who came to my last autograph session. To my children, who always give me more energy. And to you, my dear readers, who are holding this book in your hands at this very moment.

Thank you very much!

July 2019: Now that I think of it, this is my first Reiwa era book.
—Fuminori Teshima

Bonus Short Stories

Childhood Friends

“Oh, Lilith. Is it okay for you to be up?”

“Yeah. I talked to His Majesty already. I’m fine now,” Lilith said as she smiled back at her childhood friend Selphy. She had seen a strange dream in the morning and was in bad shape, but she returned to work in the kitchen come the afternoon.

“Don’t push yourself too hard, you hear? Sir Raphael said that getting some proper rest is, like, totally part of the job.”

“He’s pretty good at taking care of others despite how uncaring he looks, huh...? Wait, what are you reading there?”

It was, in fact, time for their break, but strangely enough, Selphy was reading a bulky book.

“It’s a novel Miss Gremory lent me. It’s pretty neat, actually. It’s, like, a story about two girls, but they’re all worried about whether they’re friends or lovers.”

“...Can you tell me more about it?”

“Sure thing? Does this sort of story interest you?”

“Th-Th-That’s not what I mean! Well, um, there’s a need for me to understand the interests of the masses as the princess of the noble succubi, right?” Lilith denied being interested in a fluster, which made Selphy curiously cock her head.

“I don’t really understand, but I’m sure you’ve got a point!”

“...Aren’t you also royalty? Actually, what do you think about it?”

“Huh? It’s totally okay, isn’t it? I mean, aren’t Miss Nephteros and Miss Chastille in that kind of relationship?”

“Huh? Isn’t that Angelic Knight in a relationship with His Majesty’s friend, Ba... Bar... Bearbatos?” Lilith grimaced as she tried to recall his name, and Selphy sat down next to her nonchalantly.

“Well, you know I love you, right Lilith?”

“What?!”

“I mean, we’re childhood friends, right? I wanna be with you forever!”

“...Hmph. Well, I suppose that doesn’t sound all that bad.”

The uplifting conversation made it feel like Lilith’s languid feeling from the morning was a mere dream.

Avoiding More Questions

“By the way, Mister Shax, are you here to make a report today?” Kuroka and Shax were in front of Zagan’s castle as she posed that question.

“Yeah, something like that. The boss wanted to know how things have been going since Alshire Imera.”

“...Is that all? Even from the hallway, I could tell he was pretty angry.”

“Apparently his relative got caught in the incident.”

“Is that so? Is that also the reason you were panicking earlier?”

“Huh? Uh... Oh! Yeah, that’s it!”

“I see. But... you’re lying, right?”

Kuroka could hear Shax’s face cramp. She was fairly confident in her ability to read others. And with someone as simple as Shax, tone and presence were more than enough to catch a lie.

“A-A-A-About that! Uhhh...”

Cold sweat ran down Shax’s face, making Kuroka even more suspicious. She wanted him to properly talk to her about things if he was in any kind of trouble... Not that she thought that Zagan would ignore his subordinates in their time of need, but that man’s awkwardness surpassed her imagination. And, as she puzzled herself over what the issue was, for some reason, Shax suddenly grabbed her shoulder.

“Kurosuke!”

“Eep? Y-Yes?!”

“I swear! I don’t plan to ever let you go through anything dangerous! And I don’t plan to leave your side! So, um, don’t worry about it!”

“U-U-Uhhh...”

Kuroka’s knees gave way due to his suddenly serious words that also pretty much sounded like a confession.

“H-Hey? You okay?”

“I-I mean, you just...”

“Oh well. Come on, I’ll carry you, so let’s get back to the church already,” Shax picked up Kuroka without any hesitation as he said that. Plus, he wrapped his arms around her knees and back, in a so-called bridal carry.

“A-Ah...”

Kuroka suddenly forgot to push him for answers because of his sudden counterattack. She only got her answer several days later, with the absolute worst possible timing.



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An Archdemon's Dilemma: How to Love Your Elf Bride: Volume 9
by Fuminori Teshima

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Original Japanese edition published in 2019 by Hobby Japan
This English edition is published by arrangement with Hobby
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English translation © 2019 J-Novel Club LLC

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Ebook edition 1.0: February 2020